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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

NO. 533. | FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 18TH, 1899. | ONE PENNY

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During the past few years "Made in Germany" has become all too familiar to Britishers. But though the Germans run us close in many a market, there is one department in wl ich they shiver on the brink and fear to launch away. We never see advertisements of "**Pills** made in Germany." Why? Because they lack the skill, genius, and brains to make a Pill that shall equal—say Page Woodcock's Wind Pills, the finest remedy in the world for the cure of Indigestion, Wind on the Stomach, Liver Complaints, Biliousness, Costiveness, Sick Headache, Palpitation of the Heart, &c.

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No. 10.

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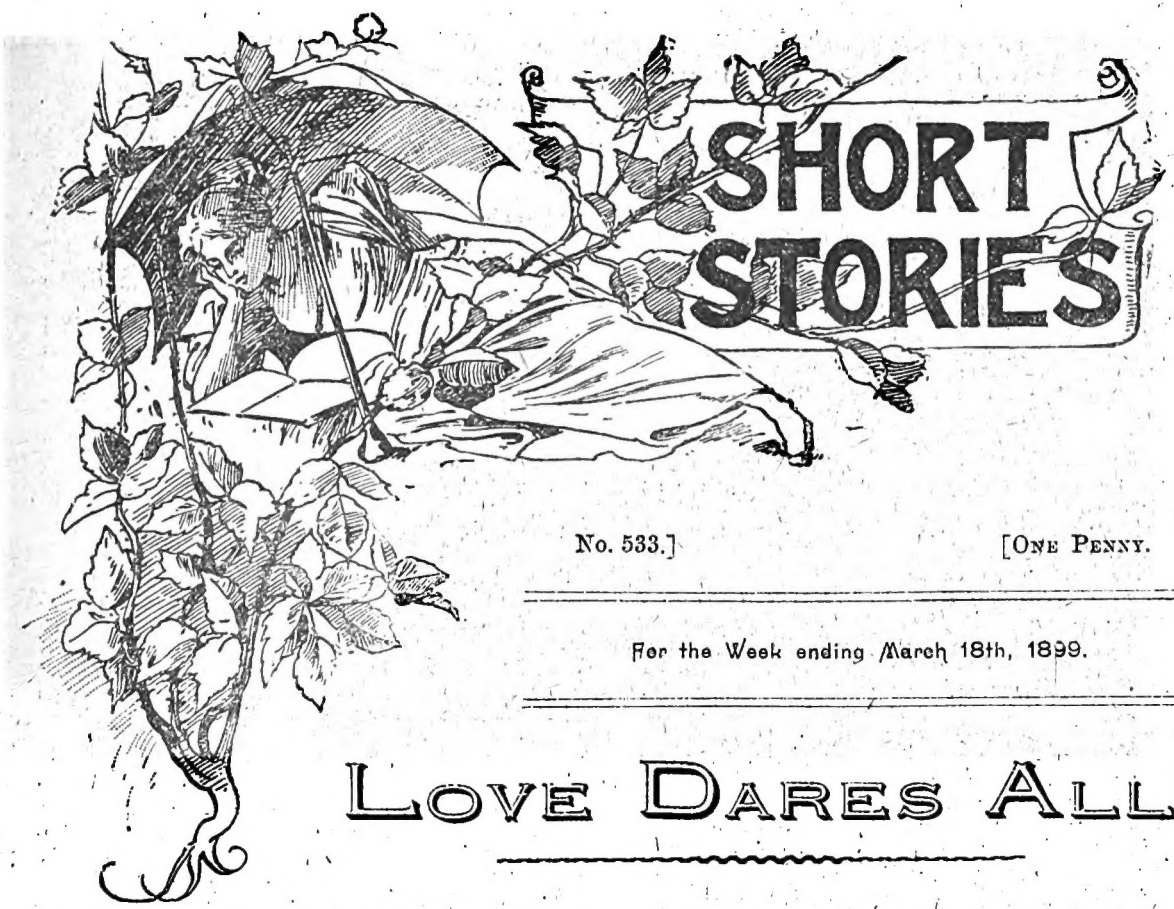

No. 533.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending March 18th, 1899.

Love Dares All.

Tat-tat-tat sounded in a dreary monotone from the drums, and slowly, in single file, the miserable prisoners came into view. Ragged, dirty, unkempt, footsore, panting from the blazing August sky, they were truly a pitiable sight. Yet they held up their heads defiantly, and smiled derisively at the insulting epithets and grimaces which the lower classes heaped upon them, especially in the vicinity of any officer's residence. The better classes of the Havanese showed their sympathy in striking contrast to the jeers and jibes of the baser sort.

The year was 1851, directly after the capture of Crittenden, Lopez's brave lieutenant, in his ill-starred expedition to Cuba. He and his Spartan remnant were these forlorn prisoners.

When they reached the Calle de la Lamparilla, one of the narrow streets of the city, the guards suddenly halted the column and reverently bared their heads. A funeral procession was approaching from the opposite direction, and the line was pushed close towards the houses jutting on the narrow footway, scarcely worthy the name of pavement.

A youth among the foremost prisoners, who, evidently, had not the fortitude of his elder companions, judged by his bowed head and deep dejection, now looked up with a wan smile of recognition as a pair of dark eyes brimming with tears gazed through a latticed window at the pitiful sight.

"Amalia!" he whispered.

"Robercito! Is it indeed you? Oh, how terrible! I did not dream you were with them."

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"Dearest cousin, save me!" he replied, in Spanish as fluent as her own. "We are all condemned to be shot in two days, perhaps sooner. I am too young to die."

"Would that I could, but, alas! I am powerless as a lamb among wolves!"

"Amalia, don't say that! You have friends among the Spaniards. For the love of my mother——"

"Forward, march!" rang on the air, and the weary column passed on to the dungeons of Morro Castle.

That night the Señorita Amalia de Valdez was a dream of loveliness as she reclined listlessly among the cushions on a lounge in her handsome salon. She was considered to be the beauty of beauties in the capital famed for the grace and loveliness of its women.

Young Captain Antonio de Ramon, who presently entered, was so enraptured with her appearance that only the presence of the inevitable duenna restrained him from throwing himself at her feet in reality, as well as in the formal salutation with which Spanish gentlemen greet all ladies.

But she looked pre-occupied, sad, despondent, and replied absently to his greeting. He seated himself near her, while the duenna, her gentle aunt Maria, retired to a distant corner.

"Tell me, my soul," said he, "why are you so melancholy?"

A sigh was the only answer.

"Ah, yes! I know your tender heart aches for the poor prisoners you have seen to-day. Poor fellows! Theirs is a terrible fate. But tell me, what is it you wished to ask me? Can there be a wish of yours I

would not gratify at the risk of my life, if need be? I have your precious note safe here," and he pointed to his heart. "You have but to command and I will obey."

"Aunt *mia*," said Amalia, turning to her aunt, "I have mislaid my pearl bracelet upstairs. Will you kindly look for it?"

The duenna vanished as if she had expected the request. Amalia turned to him at once and said:

"You have often sworn that you love me to distraction; is it not so, Antonito?"

What happiness it was for him to hear from her lips the diminutive "ito" added to his name, which, in itself, is a caress in words.

"My life, with all my heart and soul," he exclaimed. But she drew back.

"No, I give myself only to him who proves his love."

"What can I do for you, beloved? Dispose of me as you will for life."

"It is life I ask. Sit here, beside me, dearest, and I will tell you."

She then related the scene of the morning, the discovery that Roberto, who had passed the previous winter in Havana with his family, was now among the prisoners.

"He is the son of my favourite aunt—so young, barely sixteen. He came here to perfect himself in Spanish, and I inspired him with my own enthusiasm for the Cuban cause. He has returned, alas! to die, unless you will save him for my sake. Should he perish, I can never know another happy moment."

Antonio grew pale as he listened.

"Amalia, you cannot break my heart thus. Ask me anything else."

"Antonito *ma!* I love you," she sobbed. "For you I would give up home, relatives, country, for this one favour. Save that poor child, and I swear to become your wife in another month. You have said that if I would marry you, you would resign your hateful commission in the army and seek a home in Mexico. I will follow you there and to the end of the earth."

"You have won," he said after a pause. "For you I will dare anything. They are to be shot the day after to-morrow. I have but a short time, and now must leave you, dearest. If I fail, you will forgive me, will you not? or I will not survive my disgrace."

* * * * *

Roberto lay on a pallet beside two comrades, who, in the midst of their own misery, tried to cheer and fortify the boy, exhorting him to meet manfully a doom which they felt was even more terrible for him than for them.

He had been one of the most enthusiastic volunteers: had fought well, but now the near prospect of death seemed to make a coward of him.

A soldier entered the cell at this moment, and roughly bade him rise and follow to the captain's room. Roberto rose tremblingly.

"Courage, my boy," said a middle-aged man, "perhaps it is good news for you. If not, beware lest he wring from you a word about Lopez's plans."

"Never fear," he replied, making an effort to control his agitation. "I hate to die"—here he gulped down a sob—"this way, but I'll not be a traitor."

The guard interrupted further speech by pushing him into the corridor with his musket.

"Here is the prisoner, captain."

"Very well, you may retire, sergeant."

Antonio locked the door after him, and in a low tone briefly related to Roberto the plan he had formulated for the latter's escape.

"Each prisoner will receive three shots. By dint of extensive bribery, and the co-operation of a surgeon, a secret friend of the Cuban cause, I have arranged that three blank cartridges shall be fired at you. You must be careful to simulate death as much as possible until the word 'Amalia' is whispered in your ear. Then you may breathe freely and open your eyes, for you will be temporarily safe.

"Further details will then have been arranged and will be communicated to you. The least indiscretion on your part, the least bungling on that of those I have employed, though only two are in the secret, will ruin me as well as seal your fate."

Roberto thanked him fervently, and promised him implicit obedience.

"You must not return to your comrades."

"Poor fellows!" muttered Roberto.

"The light of hope is shining in your eyes, and might betray us. Look as downcast as when you entered, if possible. Come in, sergeant," he said, and, as he entered the door, added, "conduct this prisoner to a solitary cell. He must have no communication with the other filibusters."

They passed out, and Antonio, groaning deeply, murmured:

"Oh, my love, what a sacrifice!"

* * * * *

The courtyard of the castle was thronged with soldiers as the unfortunate band were marched to their death-place just as day was breaking over the beautiful bay. Surrounded by hostile soldiers they still maintained a defiant air, even when the glittering line of bayonets faced them, and they knew all hope was over.

"Kneel, filibusters!"

The command was not obeyed; the men proudly refused.

A struggle ensued, in which some were forced to their knees; perhaps all might have been, had not the officer in charge, with a touch of humanity, begun giving the orders.

At the word "Fire!" so deadly was the volley that few survived it, and they but a few moments. Roberto, happily, had no need to simulate death. The shock and strain of the suspense had caused him to faint, and the surgeon, who hastened to his side, gave a deep sigh of relief as he perceived Roberto's rigid unconsciousness

"Carry this body, and this, and this,"—pointing to several—"to the hospital."

"If they are not dead now, they will soon be under his knife," laughed one of his assistants.

When Roberto revived, he found himself in a carefully darkened room. With joy he heard the word "Amalia" in a friendly voice. In a day or two, according to Antonio's previously concerted arrangements, he was smuggled, in the disguise of a waterman, to an English ship in the harbour and concealed in the hold all night.

The next day he thanked his devoted cousin as he inhaled with a glad sense of freedom, the fresh breeze of the sea. He never returned to Cuba.

The gay capital of Cuba was quite electrified a month later to learn of the resignation from the Army of Captain Antonio, and his marriage immediately after, in spite of opposition on the part of her family to the beautiful Señorita Amalia de Valdez.

Winnifredé Wilberforce.

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"The Belle of the Trebizond" appeared last week.

A FAIR, fragile, small-featured, little woman, neatly dressed in black, and wearing the tokens of her widowhood, knelt by the side of a huge dress basket into which she was tumbling, pell mell, sundry articles of clothing.

"Is 'oo doin' way, muvver, 'oo take Nigel?" said a baby voice at her elbow. She looked down to meet the gaze of a pair of wistful blue eyes turned on her questioningly.

"Why, of course, Sonny. Oh, don't look at me with those eyes, child. You seem to reproach me. You look at your mother as if she were about to commit some awful crime. Will the child never smile, I wonder?"

But the baby eyes were all misty, and in an instant she caught him in her arms passionately.

"Your mother is a brute, Sonny, and you—you are an angel, only I wish you were a *little* more human. Now, if only you'd howl as most babies I have seen do, instead of looking hurt; but you can't help it, I suppose, it's your poor dear father's heritage passed on—Sonny," she said, releasing him, "go and tell Oko Yama mother will have tea on the veranda."

The little feet trotted off willingly. Nigel Croft was the essence of implicit obedience although but two and a half years old. Cherith Croft threw herself into a low deck chair.

"Oh, life, how strange you are," she said. "Here am I, a widow of but two months, now on my way back—back on the old, old trail, the trail that in my thoughts is always new; back to Wellington, and—and, of course, I'm very wicked, but all the time I'm wondering why Mr. Barton hasn't written, and if he and Hugh are still on the *Trebizond*. I don't think I could trust myself to cross again with him; but he may be married, or—or dead." She shuddered at this last thought. "What nonsense to think of him at all."

Pattering feet were heard returning on the veranda.

"Ah, Sonny—what, a letter for mother? Oh, Nigel, from Mr. Barton, too."

His mother had got into the habit of talking to the child of all that was in her heart, and she never knew how much he understood. The long, long months that she had been left by her husband, with only Jap servants and her one English maid (whom she had now sent into Sydney in advance to arrange for their removal from "Warrimoo") had thrown her and the child very much together, more than perhaps was good for him.

"Muvver," he interrupted, "is Mr. Barton muvver's fwend on the big ship. Sall Nigel love him?"

"Yes, sonny, you must love him right up to the skies. He's mother's only friend; and now I'm going to read his letter," she added.

And she did aloud. She had forgotten she had told the babe to listen, and he sat at her feet, his blue eyes full of wonder and a pucker in his little bronzed forehead.

"DEAR MRS. CROFT,

"I was indeed glad to have your letter, though sorry at the news it contained of your trouble. You know already that you have my sympathy, do you not? And I am sure I can say truly that of one other. Need I mention his name? You ask three questions concerning him; let me answer them. He is not on the *Trebizond*, having removed the voyage after you were with us to a newer ship of the line. There he has been promoted to first engineer, and still writes me. He is still unmarried. As answer to your third question, I am going to say what, but for your husband's accident and death, would never have been said, and that is that Hugh Thornburgh loved you on the *Trebizond*, kept out of your way the day you left, because he could not trust himself to see you, and left the ship because he could not bear it after. We shall be leaving again next week—the *Black Watch* the week after. Need I say I can guarantee you the greatest attention on either.

"Yours always to command,

"NIELS BARTON."

Cherith Croft was alone. She had sent Sonny out at the mention of his father to tell Oko Yama to pull the chairs out of the sun, and be quick.

She looked lovingly again at the words in the latter half of the letter, then buried her face, blushing as that of a girl of nineteen at her first love-letter, in the soft cushions of her chair. "And to think that I'm reading it in the very same chair that I sat in when I told Niels. Oh, Sonny, Sonny, your little mother's very wicked, but so very happy, dear," she said, hugging him to her as he returned to say tea was waiting.

"*My* little muvver's very good," said Sonny reproachfully, as though she were slurring him, slipping his wee hand into hers and toddling off.

Ere he had drained every drop of his lime juice and set down his silver mug with an air of satisfaction, his little mother had decided that she could not catch the *Trebizond*, and that the time of starting of the *Black Watch* would suit her admirably.

Three days later, with her boy and her retinue of faithful Jap servants, the wife of the late Commissioner of Lands and Mines left "Warrimoo" behind her for ever. She called it her life school; there she had learnt the value of obedience without question, of duty minus love.

Content had come into her life and left its traces on her face, which motherhood had softened wondrously; but never had she known the happiness that now filled her heart as they steamed up the coast by the Government yacht to Sydney.

* * * * *

"Louise, are you sure it was only 650 lbs. baggage the agent said? Then I must leave Sonny's portable kitchen behind."

Scarcely had Cherith Croft given vent to this most prosaic reflection, when she felt the gaze of two dark brown eyes riveted on her, and she looked up to see a handsome, boyish figure, half hesitating before her, his hand to his cap.

"Ah, Mrs. Croft, I thought I could not be wrong," as she smiled, "but this," touching her arm lightly, "makes a difference. I did not know," he added, rather confusedly.

"Of course not—how should you? Why, you've only arrived to-day, haven't you? We are waiting to cross by the *Black Watch*, and I was discussing the baggage with Louise. Louise, you may return to the hotel with baby—and, Louise, order tea for two. You will come, will you not?"

Hugh Thornburgh smilingly bowed his delight at the prospect.

"We were on our way to the office," she went on.

"So I supposed when I met you in Bridge Street," he put in.

How handsome he looked, thought Cherith as she glanced up at him from the side of her little widow's bonnet; but the light on the brass buttons of his new uniform was dull to the light that shone in Hugh Thornburgh's dark eyes as he said:

"Can the baggage wait now. I have something to tell you—a bit of good luck that has fallen to my share. Can I count on your congratulations, I wonder?"

What could it be? she wondered. Was it possible he was going to tell her that he was engaged? Did that account for his bright face? She caught her breath sharply, and forced a little smile as she answered:

"That will depend on whether you think you deserve them."

"Well, my old granddad—did you know he was Sir Jasper Thornburgh, of the Windermere family?—has thought fit to depart this life and to leave his favourite grandson, whom I have been informed by his lawyers was me, the great bulk of his fortune. The estate goes to my eldest brother, my father being dead, and the neat little sum of £20,000 to yours truly."

A glad new light broke on her face.

"Oh! I am so glad—so glad for your sake," she said.

And as they walked up the steps of the hotel, which looked out on to the harbour, and he made her feel so happy and at ease with a new air of protection that sat so well on him, visions of Government appointments that her father might find to suit the heir of Sir Jasper Thornburgh—who was, of course, quite another person from the second engineer of the *Trebizond*—flashed through her mind.

"I suppose you will leave the *Black Watch* now," she said, as he brought her her tea, "and," falteringly, "go to England."

She looked up with a brave attempt at a smile.

"Well, I suppose I must, as I scarcely want the berth now, and there are others wanting it badly. You see, I only knew an hour since, when I got my letters."

An awkward pause was filled in by Sonny, who appeared, robed by Louise in his best bib and tucker in honour of mother's visitor.

"Muvver," he inquired, his blue eyes dwelling with a look of curiosity on Hugh's bright buttons, "is zis muvver's only fwend, Mr. Barton, off the big ship?"

"No, dearest, this is Mr. Barton's friend. Mr. Thornburgh, this is my little son. Come and say how do you do, Sonny. Nigel is an angel, but the child never smiles," she added *sotto voce*. "Do you think anything would make him?"

"I think I could do it if only you would let me try," he said; then added softly, "It will be partly conditional, I presume, being the angel that he is that Nigel copies his mother in everything. Now, if his mother were happy she would smile; so you see the cure must begin with mother. Isn't that so, Nigel?"

The boy nodded his golden head that Hugh was stroking with that bronzed hand of his that could be as gentle in its touch as any woman's.

"Iss, but muvver won't have 'oo for a fwend like Mr. Barton, else I fink 'oo could, 'cos muvver loves him and says he made her happy. Will 'oo have him for a fwend, muvver," he added, dragging Hugh towards his mother's chair, his blue eyes full of the solemn earnestness of the question in his childish mind that he only half understood.

His mother looked up, and Hugh caught a flash of the old Cherith he had known on the *Trebizond*.

"I didn't think he'd be satisfied with that title, Sonny," she said shyly, blushing a rosy red.

Hugh had been dragged to her feet by Sonny to await the verdict, and when he saw her blushing face and the downcast eyes he caught her two little white hands between his own brown palms, rapturously covering them with kisses.

Sonny smiled his approval—the cure had begun already—and sat down to the discussion of some cakes he had found.

"Is it possible, my queen, my sweet little Cherith, that you have another title to give me?" went on Hugh. "I have so long been the poor man content with the crumbs from the rich man's table that I cannot take in all this happiness at once, and—and I was afraid of this," touching her sleeve lightly. "I did not know how long since it was."

"A little more than two months," she said; "but oh, Hugh, though I tried so hard to be good, I was never happy, never as happy as I am now, dear. He was good, oh, so good, and I respected him, but I did not love him, Hugh. Is it very wicked to be so happy now. I was true to him, aye, even in thought till his death, for I promised Mr. Barton I would live to be worthy of his and your good opinions, and I think I made him a good wife," she added pleadingly.

"Sonny, it is time for bed, dear. Go to Louise." And the little one trotted off obediently.

Then Hugh took her in his arms, and kissed away the unshed tears that were trembling in the blue eyes; and when he left her later, to get off a letter to his lawyers, it was with a bright, glad face and a gay laugh that she said "And you'll see to the baggage, Hugh?"

"Aye," he answered, "and the sauciest bit of it, too, for I guess she will give me most trouble, eh?"

As Hugh had surmised, there were many ready to take his place, and since he found he could draw on his granddad's legacy from the Sydney branch of his bank, he sped up to the Metropole early next morning, his project fresh in his mind.

"Don't you think, little one, that I could take you home and ask for the paternal blessing—not that it's a necessity—at the same time? We can wait for the *Trebizond's* return. Will a month's courtship satisfy you, dear? and that will appease society, too. Then Barton can be best man, and we can be married in Wellington. You'll like that better than Sydney, eh, dear?"

"Yes," she answered, nestling into his strong arms. And so it happened that two months after a quiet wedding took place from Government House.

* * * * *

A year later they were sitting on the veranda at "Coogee." Sir Philip had given them his little country

bungalow on the outskirts of Wellington as his wedding gift.

A tiny morsel of humanity, with twinkling black eyes, and draped in gauze and costly laces—for it was the New Zealand summer, and the thermometer registered sixty in the shade—lay on its mother's lap. Its father was engaged in puffing volumes of smoke into its face "just to see if it could sneeze."

Nigel stood over him as protector, and, when too exasperated, made a lunge at his father. He had approved of his new father when he found that he could draw plans and pictures; but, although Hugh succeeded in making him smile, he had never got him to romp.

"Hugh, don't tease him any more," said his wife as severely as she could, "or I shall order you to carry baby in."

This threat always had the desired effect—he was afraid the thing would fall in pieces, he said—and he desisted from experimenting on the face of Hugh Barton Thornburgh.

"What a contrast the two boys will be, Hugh. Nigel loves little Hugh very much, but he'll keep him in order when he grows up; and he'll need it, too. Just look at the rascal now, laughing at six weeks old."

"What do you expect when he has a mother who, for all her dignity now, was once the Belle of the *Trebizond*. And Cherie," he added seriously, "you'll keep that roguishness always, won't you, for I learnt to love you then."

And, for all we ever heard to the contrary, this couple lived happily ever after.

Edna S. Gamble.

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IN A PALE PINK GOWN.

THE scene — Waterloo; the hour — mid-day. A throng of eager men pressing towards the barrier that keeps them back until the train for Kempton Park is ready. The event coming off that afternoon is an important one. The Heir-Apparent has announced an intention of being present. The ever gracious Princess proposes accompanying His Highness, and a gentleman who passes the busy, gossiping groups on his way to another platform, sends a wistful look towards them.

He is recognised and seized by a couple of acquaintances.

"Hi, Cheltnam; Hallo, Rollo; Whither bound, my boy? Aren't you going with us?"

"I wish I were. I should dearly like to see that race run."

"Not too late," interposed one of his friends. "Get your ticket, and come along."

Rollo Cheltnam shook his head, and declared it to be impossible.

"I did not know that word was in your dictionary," laughed the other. "But you're made up for travelling—dust-coat and valise. Whither goest thou? Running away from your creditors, or off for your honeymoon? Married your landlady's or your laundress' daughter on the sly, eh?"

It was Rollo's turn to laugh now, which he did rather ruefully.

"I don't know if I should be much worse off if I had committed the sin of matrimony, providing the maiden was fair to see. But if I haven't, my brother Tom has, and I'm suffering for it."

"But that's ten years ago," he was reminded. "Didn't Tom marry the prettiest of Mayor Ernest's daughters just before he went to India to take up that appointment?"

"Yes," said Tom Cheltnam's brother; "and he is now the happy parent of six or seven, I forget which, and had made arrangements for a two years' leave, that he might bring his wife over to recruit her health, and find schools for the elder boys. But unluckily, there has been a revolt of some of the hill tribes, and Tom must stay to help quell it, so he has sent Mrs. Tom and the olive branches by the *Enterpe* and will follow as soon as he can."

"In the meantime, on you devolves the delightful task of meeting the lady when she lands."

"She has landed. Owing to that gale, the *Enterpe* arrived before the mail that brought Tom's letter. My sister-in-law is already housed at Borton Court, a pretty little place, half farm, half country-house, near Hythe, secured for her by one of her sisters, whose husband is in the Artillery, and quartered at Dover."

"And you?"

Rollo shrugged his shoulders.

"I am the happy individual who, being popularly supposed to have nothing to do because I am a journalist, am expected to go to Mrs. Cheltnam's and execute all her commissions. I have a cart-load of them in the guard's van, besides the high chairs, perambulators, and bath-tubs that are to follow by goods train. Tom will depend on me—so he writes—to keep up her spirits till he can join her; and I am to take care that no one imposes on her. Cissie herself telegraphs that she cannot stay in that lonely place unless I am there to keep guard over the safety of her darling ones. She evidently anticipates their being gurgled one by one, and will expect me to do sentry—go in her nursery, armed with a revolver and a Malay creese."

"I don't envy you, old fellow," said one of the young men.

"But you'll think of me tenderly, won't you? and, by Jove, that's my train over yonder. Here's my new address; send me a fuller, truer report of the day's doings than I shall glean from the newspapers. Adieu!"

Rollo Cheltnam's sister-in-law was waiting for him at Hythe Station in a pony-chaise, so small that it was difficult to find room for his valise, even though the boy groom was left to follow with the sundries in a cart.

"It is hard on your long legs, my poor Rollo," said Mrs. Cheltnam, a still pretty, though faded blonde, "but these are such up-and-down roads, and my wrists are so weak, that I thought it prudent to hire the lightest vehicle I could get. If I am to be upset, I don't want to be buried under a ton weight of iron and clumsy wood-work."

"Shall I relieve you of the responsibility of driving?" she was asked.

"Well—no, thanks; I think not," said Mrs. Cheltnam. "You see, if we do have a spill, I shall

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not be half so angry with myself, as I should be with you, if the fault were yours."

"You are as frank as ever," her brother-in-law told her. "As frank as when you objected to my acting as best man to my brother, because I was so ugly and awkard."

"Ah, that was when you were but a lad. I shouldn't say so now. You really have improved so much, so very much that—I have two marriageble sisters; I think I shall ask them to come to Borton Court while you are with me."

"Better not," was the laughing response. "I cannot wed both, and it might cause dissension in the family. Besides I am not a marrying man. With so many nephews and nieces, it is my bounden duty to live and die a bachelor after amassing a fortune for them."

To which speech Mrs. Cheltnam irreverently answered: "Bah! I suppose the truth is, you are already engaged."

"No, on my honour; the bright, particular star I am to worship, has not yet dawned on the horizon."

"Then you must be dreadfully hard to please, sir!" This was said with much severity.

"There's lots of good, pretty girls to be had, now aren't there?"

"Ask Tom. He'll tell you he never knew but one, and as he snapped her up, there is nought left for me."

"If you are going to talk such utter nonsense, Rollo!" and the lady frowned, and menaced him with the whip, "why, we shall quarrel."

"To avert which sad catastrophe shall we agree to banish the subject on which we have differed? I promising to do my *devoirs*, as your trusty knight, and you binding yourself not to put any snares in the way of my unwary footsteps."

"Snares, indeed! I'm not so sure that either Pet or Popsy would consent to accept a newspaper-man," cried Cissie, tossing her head.

"And so you'll not expose me to the mortification of a rejection. Bless, thee, sweet sister mine! Is there either of your babies to whom I could be godfather, in token of my gratitude?"

"You'll have to be very fond of them all, or I shall be dreadfully hurt. Tom is such an adoring parent. Oh, Rollo, I feel lost without him; no one to appeal to in any difficulty, no one to rely upon!"

"Rely upon it, we shall be over that bank if you do not wipe the tears out of your eyes. Did you have a pleasant voyage?"

"Pleasant, with six children, an incompetent ayah, and an English maid who fibbed shamefully. She wanted to get home to her soldier-husband, so protested, by everything sacred, that she was never ill at sea, and yet lay in her berth three parts of the time, and I—yes, I—had to crawl out of mine to wait on her. Don't I look a perfect wreck? But, of course, I must after what I went through."

"Do you like your house?" queried Rollo, desirous of introducing a new subject.

"I have scarcely looked at it. There must be stronger bolts and locks put on the doors, or how shall I be able to sleep? and outside shades to the windows, for the glare hurts my eyes; and some soft felt laid down in the passages; for the clatter of the children's feet distracts my poor head. And there must be double doors to the nurseries, and bars to the windows—what would Tom say to me if I let one of his darlings fall out?—and a railing round a nasty little fish-pond there is in the orchard; and the drawing-room paper is odious. It must be taken down before I can sit there, or receive visitors. But, of course, dear Rollo, you'll see to all these things for me, and don't forget some donkeys for the little ones. I told them they should have some when Uncle Rollo came."

"With I myself as the leader? My prominent thought just at this moment is what are you going to give me for dinner. I suppose you have engaged a cook?"

"Oh, yes, and kitchenmaid, besides a couple of housemaids. I don't know whether the latter will prove satisfactory. My cousin Marian, who met me when I landed, pressed me so strongly to take a couple of girls, sisters, from her industrial school, that I had to say yes. They seem active and willing, but so stupid, so vacant that, after trying for half an hour this morning to make one of them understand what I meant by a *portiere*, I gave it up in despair. I really cannot be worried. I don't want Tom to find me haggard and ill."

"Is the cook as stolid? If so—alas! and woe is me—what shall we have to eat?"

"Oh, she sent up a lovely curry last night, so there's hopes of her. I went downstairs to interview her this morning, but my first glance at her frightened me away. She is one of the ugliest, boniest women I ever beheld! As tall as a grenadier, with a voice like a bassoon, and eyes—protruding eyes—so fierce that I shiver when I think of them. I shall never venture into her domain again—never! The remembrance of her hideousness will give me bad dreams."

"Which her excellent cooking will chase away. There's consolation in that thought, isn't there? Now tell me something about my unknown nephews and nieces."

But though Rollo Cheltnam testified the correct amount of interest in his young relatives, he was not sorry to hear on his arrival at Borton Court that they were just going to tea, and then to bed, and the interview must be deferred till the morrow.

Mrs. Cheltnam had not lauded too extravagantly the abilities of her ugly *cuisinière*. The dinner was not only cooked well, but served prettily, flowers decorating the dishes and the table with a tastefulness of which the stolid maids who waited were evidently incapable.

"She will be a treasure if she keeps out of sight," her mistress declared; "but I must either shut my eyes when I give my orders, or send written ones. Dear me!" and Mrs. Cheltnam leaned back in her chair to survey herself in a mirror, "what an affliction it must be to be plain!"

Anxiety on the score of her complexion sent the lady to her room at an early hour, Rollo sitting up till midnight to write letters.

He had just completed his task when, in tying a string round some papers he wanted to have posted, he contrived to dig a pen-knife into the fleshy part of his thumb, and, to his vexation, it bled so much that he was obliged to make his way to the kitchen, there to bathe the wound, and try to find someone to bind it up.

But the servants appeared to have followed the example of their mistress, and retired early, for not a sound could he hear as he pushed open the double doors leading to the offices. However, a bright little fire still glowed in the stove; a lamp was burning on a small table by the hearth; and he saw, as he softly advanced, that a young girl was seated in an arm-chair beside the table, an open note-book and pencil on her knees, and in her hand a volume, in which she was so absorbed that she did not detect his footsteps.

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Her dress was an ordinary print, her cap and apron of coarse muslin, but the gown of palest pink fitted her splendid figure *à merveille*, and her apron was as coquettish and becoming as the little French cap tied in a bewitching bow and ends under the coronet of her dark hair.

She sprang up as soon as she became aware of Rollo's presence. Her colour deepened, and she bit her lip in manifest embarrassment, but still hers was not the awkward confusion of an uneducated girl. She bowed politely in acknowledgment of his apology, offered her help as soon as she learned what had brought him there, fetched sponges and warm water, and tore up her handkerchief—a cambric one—to form a bandage for the wounded thumb.

He thanked her warmly for her assistance, saying, with a smile:

"I shall have to recant one of my heresies. I thought that between fifteen and fifty your sex were wont to greet the sight of blood with a swoon or hysterics."

"Not now that so many of us gain presence of mind and experience by joining the ambulance classes," she answered quietly.

"Have you won your medal yet?" he asked. "If not, and a testimonial from your latest patient will be of any service, I shall be most happy."

She smiled a smile so arch, so merry, that it quite changed the pensive character of her regular features; then gathered up her towels, etc., and carried them away, leaving Rollo peeping between the pages of the volume she had let fall.

It was Schiller, and in the original.

A highly educated woman apparently; but who could she be? The governess to Cissie Cheltnam's little girls? Her attire seemed to contradict that suggestion; her demeanour, her refined voice and cultured speech rendered it equally doubtful whether she could be the nurse of whom Mrs. Cheltnam had spoken slightingly, as picked up at Madras just for the voyage, and proving more plague than profit.

Rollo stood with the book in his hand, waiting to restore it to its owner, till the silence that reigned around awakened him to the truth. She had gone away with no intention of returning; and, laughing at himself for not guessing that sooner, he too, went to bed.

Cissie condoled with him at breakfast when she saw his tied-up thumb; but when he mentioned how skilfully her lady help, or children's governess, had played the doctress, she opened her blue eyes wonderingly.

"I have no lady help! Higgins is my maid, Rollo, and I have not felt up to the exertion of engaging a governess yet. I suppose I must advertise. Couldn't you interview the candidates? It is such a hateful task. I shall be harassed into my grave before I've seen half of them."

"Let Higgins—faugh, what a name!"—this *sotto voce*. "Let Higgins select from them. She looks capable enough."

"Ah! yes, she's a good soul," replied Cissie. "Rather obstinate and provoking. I'm afraid it's a mistake keeping servants with one so long. They get exaggerated ideas of their own value. She was with mamma thirteen years, and now ten with me."

Then it could not have been his sister-in-law's attendant Rollo had seen.

"It must have been your nurse who ministered to me so tenderly," he said.

"Which of them? But you must be making game of me, for you could not mistake Maimee for an English upper-servant, and I got rid of the other as soon as we landed."

Rollo forced a laugh.

"How very ridiculous I am, and how good-natured of you to bear with my nonsense so calmly!"

And then he edged away to avoid being tormented with further questioning. But all the while he talked and laughed, played with the children, and made himself useful to their indolent, exacting mother, he was carefully noting her every word and look.

Someone was mystifying him. Could it be she? Had she been in sober earnest when she spoke of her sisters, and was the lady of the pale pink gown one of these damsels already introduced into the house with designs upon his heart and hand?

* * * * *

A few days spent at Bolton Court brought Rollo Cheltnam to the conviction that Cissie's intellect was not equal to the strain of carrying out a deliberate scheme. Besides, the dangerous damsels, her unwedded sisters, had written to postpone their coming. "Dear Cis must excuse them till after their return from Weymouth, where they had been due these three weeks, and were entered to play in a grand tennis match against the officers of the regiment stationed at Portland."

Still, as he often told himself, it was queer, exceedingly queer, that so charming a person should be a member of his sister-in-law's household, and yet hold no definite position in it. She was neither nurse nor governess, maid nor help; never appearing in the drawing-room nor the nursery, where Uncle Rollo soon proved a welcome visitor.

Mrs. Cheltnam was her own housekeeper, and she had not engaged a needlewoman or sewing maid, and by no amount of indirect questioning could Rollo elicit a spark of information respecting the unknown. She was in the house, for he had seen and spoken with her, but who and what was she, and where?

Baffled at all other points, he made an excuse for revisiting the kitchen. It was that he had first beheld her, and there that his curiosity might be satisfied. In these days of progress and Board-schools, was it not possible for the student of Schiller to be neither more nor less than the daughter of the highly-respectable matron whose culinary achievements proved her to be a genius of no mean order?

But when Rollo walked into her domain, on pretence of wanting a luncheon basket packed, his first glance at Mrs. Cheltnam's Sarah, convinced him that there could be no such tie between her and the maiden of the pale pink gown. Cook was a clumsy, commonplace woman of thirty, with the limbs of a grenadier and a face that was only redeemed from positive ugliness by its air of honesty and good humour.

She was civil and obliging, but in such a monosyllabic fashion that he came away no wiser that he went. Once he fancied he caught a glimpse of flowing draperies through a half open door, and made an excuse for approaching it; but when he peeped in, nothing was to be seen but the table at which cook herself appeared to have been making pastry when he disturbed her.

He was strongly tempted to put the question outright. Where is the young lady to whom I was indebted the other night? But in spite of her civility, cook eyed him with distrust, as if suspecting some ulterior object for his presence, and to lead up to the subject with a woman who rarely answered his remarks with more than a nod or shake of the head was impossible.

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To his surprise, she abruptly addressed him as he was walking away discomfited.

"You're a lawyer, ain't you, sir?"

"A barrister—yes; but I do not practise much. Why did you ask?"

But she only dropped a curtesy, said "Thankye, sir," and dived into the scullery, where he could not very well follow.

Rollo was musing over the oddity of the circumstance that evening, as he smoked a cigar, while pacing a path at the end of the grounds, to which he frequently retreated, partly because Mrs. Cheltnam disliked it as gloomy, and forbade it to her children as damp.

The night was cloudy, darkness almost intense wherever the lime trees met overhead, and it would have startled the bravest, when a tall, gaunt figure noiselessly stalked from behind a mass of rhododendrons, and suddenly stood before him.

"It's only me, sir; Sarah Colby, sir; Mrs. Cheltnam's cook," he was told. "You gives legal advice to them as wants it, don't yer, sir?" Here a broad palm was thrust before his eyes, with a gold coin lying on it; "You'll be pleased to give me as far as it'll go, for the 'mount of that sovereign."

Rollo smiled as he replied that he dare say he could give her the information she stood in need, without putting her to any expense at all.

But he was heard with a dissenting shake.

"Thankye, sir, but it must be pay as we goes, or she won't like it; nor it wouldn't be fair neither to take up your time for nothing, seeing it's no trifling matter in which we want you to 'vise us."

We; then she was acting for another more than herself. Was it his fancy that he could hear a slight movement behind the shrubs? And was it the mysterious maiden who stood there awaiting the result of this dialogue?

"Tell me, then, plainly and frankly, what induced you to come to me. If I cannot give you the advice you lack, I can at least direct you to a gentleman who will."

Sarah was grateful, and said so in her slow, lumbering style.

"Thankye, sir. You see, it's not for me so much as the young lady as came to the hotel at Dover, where I was kitchen maid. In great trouble she was; father dead, and relations that had fetched her from convent school wanted to marry her right off there and then, to one of 'em as she couldn't abide. And when she objected, told her that her pa had left his dying orders upon her, as she was to, and must; or give up the whole of her fortune, and be a beggar."

There was quite a romance in this brief and awkwardly told story. Perhaps it might not have awakened such vivid interest if Rollo Cheltnam had not seen the person of whom it was related.

"No one in England can be compelled to marry against her will," he said. "If the relatives of this young lady were persecuting her, she should have sought other protection."

"That's just what she did, sir, catching hold o' me when I was sent to take her some tea. 'I'm ill,' says she, sobbing dreadful, 'quite ill with want of sleep and grief, and these people harass and frighten me till I feel as if I should lose my senses. Who will protect me from them?'"

"She should have appealed to the nearest magistrate."

"In the middle of the night, an' neither she nor me knew where he was to be found?" objected Sarah. "An' them downstairs always on the watch, too; an' givin' me orders to let 'em know directly, in a minute, if she stirred to leave her room. Such a big, masterful man the gentleman was! snapped you most in half if you only looked at him."

"It was a difficult position," Rollo admitted. "Could you not have spoken to the hotel-keeper?"

"The very thing as we ought to have done, and what I should ha' 'vised myself, for they're most respectable, well-conducted people; but then, they'd gone to London for a day or two, so you see we couldn't."

"Then what did you do?"

"Why, Miss Vera cried, and begged me not to leave her. She said if I could get her away—so I did it."

"Helped her to evade these people? And successfully?"

"Hid her for two nights and a day at my old aunt's, and then came here with her. They were advertising for servants for this house, and as I was known in the neighbourhood, and of good character, I got the place, and here we've been ever since."

"With Mrs. Cheltnam's knowledge and consent?"

The rhododendrons were agitated now, and from out their deep shadows glided the slender figure and fair face so deeply impressed on Rollo's memory.

"Your question, sir," she cried, "makes me keenly feel that I must not remain here any longer. I have wronged Mrs. Cheltnam, for the Belgium nuns in the convent school where my dearest father placed me, had made me proficient in all domestic matters, and I could teach this good, kind Sarah all she had not learnt. But we have only used this as an asylum, in which to hide from my cousin and his mother, till I could ascertain the addresses of some of papa's old friends, and I know I am not justified either in remaining under Mrs. Cheltnam's roof without her knowledge, nor in asking her to interest herself in my difficulties."

"That's why I says to Miss Vera the gintleman stopping in the house is a lawyer, meaning you, sir! let's hear what he's got to propose."

"Have you any reason to fear that these relations are still searching for you?"

"Yes," she replied with a sob. "Sarah just discovered that after seeking me in London, they have gone back to Dover. As they insist that they are acting on authority given them by my father, what am I to do if they succeed in finding me?"

"Are you not of age?"

"I shall be in a few days; a week at the most."

"Then do nothing hastily," Rollo advised, "but stay quietly here for the present, and trust me, they will have to give very convincing proofs of the legality of their proceedings before they shall be allowed to remove you without your consent."

The heartfelt thanks this speech elicited were very gratifying, and before Mr. Cheltnam quitted his new client, she had provided him with the names of half-a-dozen men of good position who had been on intimate terms with her father, the late Mr. Estridge, before his passion for hunting and exploring led him to join an expedition to Central Africa, where he fell a victim to fever.

Rollo's last promise, as he said good-night to Vera Estridge, was that he would go to London early on the morrow, and hunt up the said old friends till he found one capable of, and willing to accept the guardianship of the lonely orphan, and with this promise she was well content.

Mrs. Cheltnam stared, and marvelled, and murmured,

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when she found her brother-in-law on the point of starting for the rail before she found time to overwhelm him with commissions, calling him back when he was actually *en route* to assure him that unless he returned in twenty-four hours she should die with ennui and dread of the house being entered by burglars.

"Perhaps I ought to have taken Cissie into my confidence," he mused. "She must have been charmed with Miss Estridge, and all women love a spice of romance; but then she is so helpless, so brainless, that she might have been a clog on our movements instead of a help. On second thoughts, it will be more prudent to keep her in the dark."

And with this decision Rollo Cheltnam dismissed his sister-in-law from his mind, and dreamed and dwelt only on the sweetness and wrongs of Vera Estridge, and the gratifying post to which he had been elected of her defender.

* * * * *

Rollo had planned to dispatch his business in town and return speedily, in case the dreaded enemy had tracked the fugitives as surely as Sarah's friend's had warned her that they were certain to do, sooner or later.

From his conversation with Vera, he had gathered that, some time since, her father had forbidden her intimacy with these relatives; for what reasons she knew not; but it surprised her very much when they came to the convent where her education had been carried on, professing it was by Mr. Estridge's dying injunctions, communicated through the servant who was with him in his last moments, that they came to take upon themselves the charge of his only child.

Not till they had induced her to start for England with them—not till she was weak and ill with the effects of a rough passage, yet shrinking in much disgust from the lover-like attentions forced upon her—had she learned that this man was making arrangements for their marriage; the ten thousand pounds that formed her inheritance being doubtless his attraction, and his ambitious mother doing all in her power to further his plans.

That she must be saved from such nefarious schemes, was a matter of course; but it was exasperating to find that of the four or five individuals, whose names Vera had supplied, only one—a certain Lady Dunsford, the widow of a general officer—was actually in England, and she was lying at her house at Kensington, too ill to be seen, or even to read a letter.

However, two of the others were expected home shortly from a tour in Canada, and if Vera's unworthy relatives could be kept at bay till Mr. and Mrs. Lemaitre landed in England, all would be well, as he remembered the young lady had expressed herself sure of a most loving welcome from them.

These researches took up time. Rollo left Borton Court early on Tuesday, but it was the afternoon of Thursday when he came once more in sight of his sister-in-law's temporary abode.

Mrs. Cheltnam, who was writing in the drawing-room, started and screamed when he sprang in through the window. He was breathless with running; his coat torn with forcing his way through a gap, and his looks so disordered, that she began to ply him with questions.

How should he tell her that the same train that brought him back to Borton Court had also conveyed a tall, unpleasant-looking man whose name he had read on the small portmanteau he carried—"Silas Estridge."

He had watched this man take possession of the only vehicle in the station yard, and had then rushed off, bent on reaching Borton Court by short cuts and field paths before him.

From the top of a hill he had caught sight of Silas Estridge, and he was not coming alone; two roughly-dressed fellows were with him, and who could doubt that if Vera resisted, she would be dragged away by force?

He must seek and save her; but here was Cissie barring the way. How should he shake her off? Unless she could be persuaded to promise silence she would admit that Sarah Colby was in her employ, and further revelations would soon follow.

"Do not question me now," he implored, "there is not a moment to be lost. The truth is, a posse of villainous rascals are now within a hundred yards of us, and I suppose I ought to explain——"

"Pooh! you are too late with your explanations, Mr. Rollo," she interrupted. "No thanks to you for keeping me in the dark so long; but Vera has told me all about it. Yes, Vera herself. Darling Alfie was seized with croup the night after you went away, and with no one here but those stupid maids, I'm sure the child must have died, and I should have gone to a lunatic asylum if Vera had not come to me. Oh, she's a dear! and we are the best of friends. As for that wretch, let him touch her if he dare! She is under my protection now."

And Mrs. Cheltnam drew up her tiny figure, and swelled and strutted about the room, till Rollo could have laughed, if he had not been full of thankfulness for her timely aid.

Vera, too, came quickly to her side, pale and trembling, but placing every confidence in her new friends and their assurances that not even the dying injunctions of a parent could give Silas Estridge authority to remove her from Borton Court.

A few minutes, and the object of her dread and dislike was ushered into the room. Vera could scarcely sustain herself. Rollo stood beside her frowning and defiant, but Mrs. Cheltnam, with smiling self-possession, greeted her visitor.

She believed she had had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Estridge somewhere, some time since. She could not remember at whose house, her memory was so defective; but she was sure she recognised the likeness in that lady's son. Now, was it in England they met? Did Mr. Estridge like England with its horrid climate? What a day it was for a journey! He must be parched with dust, and she was afraid their sherry was not of the best; but such as it was——

She pulled the bell, and it was with difficulty he could evade her hospitable attentions, and cross the room to where Vera was sitting. And even then he found Mrs. Cheltnam still beside her.

"If you are here, Mr. Estridge," she said, pleasantly, "with any cruel idea of robbing me of my guest, I forbid it. I shall not be able to spare her just at present."

There was an ugly smile on Silas Estridge's coarse, sensual mouth, and he answered with a cynical deliberation that made Rollo impulsively clench his hand, and Mrs. Cheltnam comprehend why Vera feared him.

"You are most kind! I am so sorry I cannot accept your generous hospitality for this foolish, this mistaken

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child; but, unfortunately, she must go to London with me at once."

"There is no must where a lady is concerned," Cissie told him. "I cannot consent to let Vera go, and, frankly, my dear sir, I will not."

Mr. Estridge threw up his hands deprecatingly.

"It is not I, my dear madam, who would dream of opposing your wishes. I am merely here to give Vera the support of my presence. She will travel in the custody of these men," and he pointed to them as they stood at the open door.

"Custody?" repeated Rollo, furiously; and Mr. Estridge eyed him with covert malice.

"Alas, yes! My mother, I grieve to say, has been robbed of some valuable ornaments. They were in a travelling bag, to which no one but her niece had access, and in anger she has sworn an information against——. Officers, this young lady is the Vera Estridge mentioned in your warrant. This is your prisoner."

Then his villainy had triumphed. Knowing that he was powerless to force her into his arms in any legitimate way he had obtained her arrest, and only by suing to him for mercy, and consenting to become his wife, could she escape the horror of imprisonment—the degradation of a public trial.

Even Mrs. Cheltnam looked aghast till Rollo hurriedly whispered:

"Time, I must have more time!" and then her courage revived.

After pertinaciously questioning Silas Estridge till he was crimson with suppressed rage, she affected to believe that the charge must be well-founded, but firmly refused to let Vera's trunk be packed, or Vera herself taken away from the house, till she had ascertained that none of her valuables were missing. Drawers were searched and boxes ransacked for certain articles of jewellery that Mrs. Cheltnam insisted on having lost, and she bewailed their disappearance so naturally, and screamed so delightedly when they were found, that the policemen were hoodwinked and Silas Estridge, eager to get his prisoner away, fretted and fumed in vain.

He declined the lunch brought in, but drank copious draughts of the sherry, which Mrs. Cheltnam still disparaged, while his followers, leaving him in charge of their prisoner, went to the kitchen where Sarah Colby heaped their plates with viands, and placed between them a huge brown jug of ale, so delicious that they were in no hurry to leave it.

As for Vera she was passive, afraid to hope, yet confident that both Rollo and his sister-in-law were to be depended upon; and if, when the carriage was brought to the door that was to convey her to the station, she cast a wild look of appeal on both, their smiles revived her courage.

Silas Estridge, his face flushed, his movements none the steadier for the liquor he had been imbibing, would have drawn her hand through his arm, whispering triumphantly that she could not escape him now.

But he was seized from behind. Another train had just arrived from London, bringing with it two of the chief officials from Scotland Yard; gentlemen with whom Rollo Cheltnam had been in consultation before leaving London, and whom a telegraphic message had now brought to his assistance.

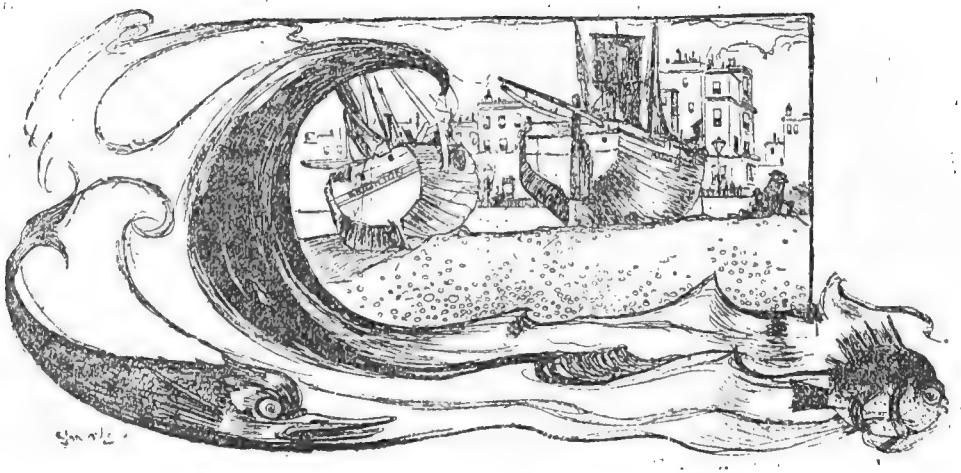
To the dismay of the schemer, he found himself under arrest for the attempted abduction of Miss Estridge, for whose appearance to answer the charge of robbery, if persisted in, bail was speedily found.

Need we say it was not persisted in. The morrow brought Mrs. Estridge to Borton Court, confessing her own guilt, and pleading for the forgiveness of her son.

Cissie always asserts that both Vera and Rollo owed a great deal to her presence of mind and quick-wittedness, and they not only admit this, but regard her as their dearest friend.

Vera is still at Borton Court, Rollo still a frequent visitor, and it has a significant appearance that whenever he is expected she may be found in the kitchen helping Sarah Colby prepare certain delicate dishes he has been heard to praise, and wearing the pale pink gown in which he whispers that he loves her best.

Louis Chalmers.



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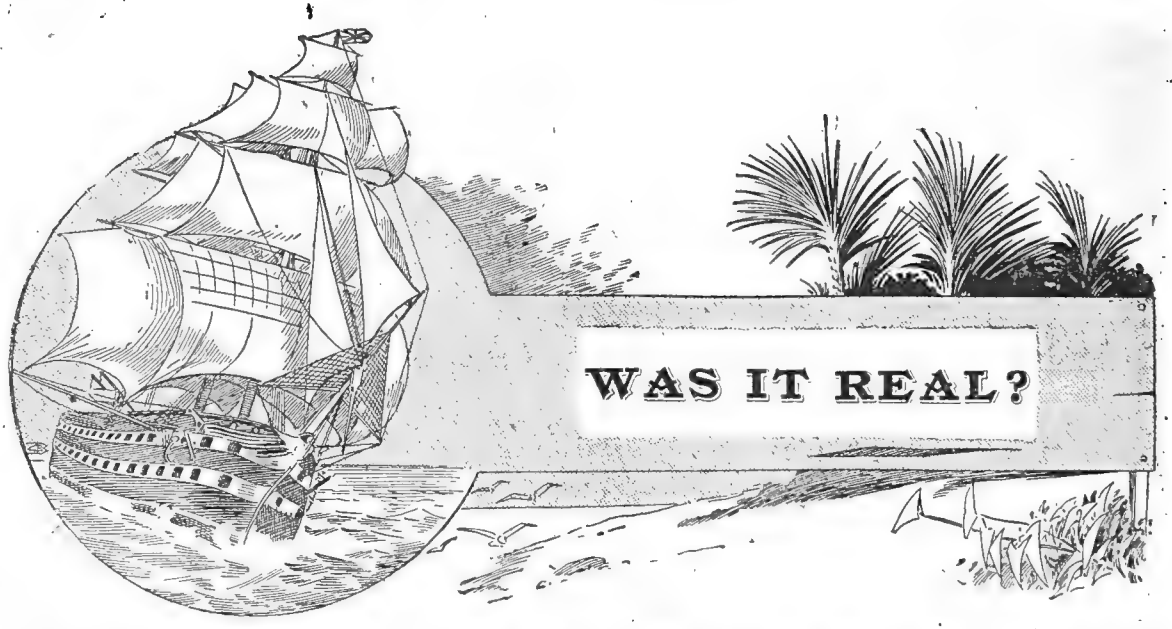

WAS IT REAL?

"I SOMETIMES think that all reality is a dream," said the Countess.

"And that we shall wake up some day and wonder at its vividness," said the journalist.

"And forget all those details which make the greatest impression on us while we are dreaming," I suggested.

We had finished dinner, and had drawn round the blazing log fire. The shutters had not been closed, and as I sat outside the semicircle, close by the Countess' elbow, I watched the heavy bands of fleecy clouds which a northwest wind was driving across the face of the moon.

The subject had been started by the doctor, who had volunteered a ghost story, and this had led to a discussion, in the course of which it transpired that we all had just a tinge of superstition in our compositions. All, with one exception—for Mrs. Grimstone had not spoken.

I had observed, however, that while apparently gazing into the fire and devoting all her attention to the sparks which now and then sailed up as the wood crackled and shifted in the grate, she was listening intently to the remarks being made, and as the Countess ventured the dogma chronicled above I gathered by the change in the expression of the face opposite me she was about to break silence with a purpose.

"I cannot say that I agree with you," said Mrs. Grimstone, in that sweet, subdued voice of hers, "but it has more than once occurred to me that many dreams are reality, and that some deficiency in our perceptions causes us to think them unreal."

"My dear Margaret" replied the Countess, "whatever brought you to think such a thing?"

"That involves the telling of a story," said Mrs. Grimstone. "I cannot tell you what it is. I could only relate to you the circumstances and leave you to classify them for yourselves. And, I do not know that I should care to tell it."

"You are very cruel to thus excite our appreciation in order only to disappoint us," cried the journalist, who never lost a possible opportunity of acquiring copy.

"And wasted a perfect *mise en scène* for a mystery tale," put in the Countess. "See, the fire is going down; we are in semi-darkness. Listen to the wind: it is blowing a gale. We shall find some trees down in the morning, and there's your moon ready to give a finishing touch to the picture."

"It is manifestly ordained that you should hold us spellbound," I pleaded.

Thus appealed to, she turned her beautiful pale face towards us as though with an effort, and appeared to debate within herself before refusing our request. But suddenly her face brightened.

"I will tell you the story if you would really like to hear it," she said, "but it is not a pleasant one for me. It has been the bane of my life for fifteen years."

Then she paused awhile, and, turning her face towards the Countess, she settled herself on the low seat as we all instinctively drew in a little and prepared to listen intently.

"Most of you are doubtless acquainted with the circumstances of my husband's death. Such things are not easily forgotten. It is close on twenty years ago since it happened.

"But you are probably not aware of the reasons for his having committed the fatal act. It is necessary that I should refer to them. The subject is a most painful one, as you will understand. He took his own life rather than suffer disgrace. We were comparatively poor, and had losses! and in a mad moment my husband had got into the clutches of a usurer.

"He had met the man at the house of an acquaintance. He was an elderly man, with a very long white beard. I took such a strong dislike to him the first time we met that I avoided him as far as I could whenever he fell in my way. He was evidently well-to-do, and lived in good style, though exhibiting intense vulgarity in all his surroundings. He was always talking about himself and the many influential people he knew, and was most objectionably familiar with every woman he came across.

"He was altogether the most loathsome person I have ever met; and, to make his appearance especially disagreeable, he had a peculiar wen-like protuberance on his throat under the chin. It was like a turkey's wattle, and

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it was evidently to hide this that he wore so long a beard."

We sat motionless as Mrs. Grimstone paused in her recital. Her story had already engrossed our attention, and the well-chosen words in which she told it were almost fascinating in their simplicity.

"Well, my husband borrowed £500 of him. I never saw the papers he signed, and could never find out what the terms were, but I do know that in the course of four weary years of harrowing suffering and constant slow torture he succeeded in squeezing more than six hundred out of my husband in constant instalments and forfeits on account of interest alleged to be due, while the original bill remained in the usurer's hands. The fiend used often to come and see my husband, and when he was out insisted on seeing me. And he used to keep reminding me during his hateful visits that he could ruin my husband and sell my home if he liked.

"I did not dare tell my husband what had happened, for fear of what he might do. Nor did I then realise what was occurring. But too late I found that one day upon leaving our house the villain had written to my husband to say that unless the full amount of the bill were paid forthwith he would ruin him.

"George shot himself that night."

She paused a moment, but the only emotion she showed betrayed itself in the increased brightness of her eyes, which seemed to be flashing in the dim light.

"He left two letters, written the afternoon of that day. One was addressed to the man who murdered him, the other to me. In my letter he explained that the course he had taken was the only one possible to save me from disgrace. He reasoned that the villain would not dare to sue his executors for money which had already been more than repaid.

"And the event proved he was right. The murderer had the infamy to send a wreath of flowers with his card to my house.

"That was twenty years ago. Ethel was yet a child, and she was my only comfort. I left England and lived quietly in Switzerland for four years. We came back just before the unexpected death of my cousin, and I succeeded to the property too late to enjoy it.

"But Ethel was growing up and I had to go about for her sake; and thus it was that we went to join the house party at Mrs. Braid's. You all know her place and what a curious assortment of people one meets there. We found the Chase rather full and sat down twenty to dinner. But the gaiety of the party and the constant round of entertainment amused Ethel, and I did not regret having come.

"On the second day we went with a merry party for a drive, and on the homeward journey one of the horses fell and broke its knee; so we were delayed and had to walk back four miles, only getting home just in time for dinner; and when we got into the drawing-room the visitors were already going out.

"There had been some fresh arrivals in the afternoon, and my attention was claimed by an old acquaintance, who took me into dinner. I didn't see who it was took Ethel, but I just saw the butterfly in her hair as she went into the room.

"The dinner was better than usual, but I had no appetite and felt indisposed. An overwhelming wave of depression had suddenly descended on me. It was quite useless fighting against it.

"I hurried out of my room at the earliest moment, and went upstairs, threw myself on my bed, and gave way to a hysterical fit of weeping.

"This relieved me, and after an hour or so I went downstairs and entered the drawing room. My absence had not been noticed. I found the gentlemen had been in some time. Someone had been playing, and everybody seemed to be in high spirits.

"'Who is that old gentleman your daughter is talking to?' asked a friend.

"I glanced round the room and saw Ethel seated at a table, idly turning over an album of views, as she chatted with her father's murderer!

"I had great difficulty in keeping my self-possession. My first impulse was to do something dreadful. Then it occurred to me that this man, though morally the murderer of my husband, was legally a tower of commercial probity; an ornament to the city, you know. I could not charge him with any crime, and to have made a scene would have been extremely ill-bred, and have served to rake up the forgotten tragedy in my life. But to see Ethel confidentially talking to the man—taking an evident pleasure in his companionship—was too frightful.

"So I told my friend that I did not know who the person was, and tried to catch Ethel's attention, to beckon her to me. But she was so engrossed in her conversation that I could not.

"Finally I sent word to Ethel that I wanted her. She appeared surprised at my message, but rose and came to me not looking best pleased at being separated from an amusing companion. 'He is so very funny,' she remarked, 'so vulgar and so conceited, and he talks about nothing but his set, and the upper-ten. I never met anything so grotesque.'

"I thought it wisest not to tell her anything, and so explained that I thought it would be nice if we were to take a walk in the grounds. It was a perfect night, and full moon. My proposal was agreed to, and we went out and strolled down the avenue and under the beeches.

"That night I undressed, but felt that I could not go to sleep, so I took a book and began to read. But my attention kept wandering, and I found myself seeing an old man's face with a white beard. And the wicked black eyes stared at me, and the bushy white eyebrows contracted, until at length I felt I could stand it no longer, and, flinging down my book, I went into the next room to seek the companionship of Ethel.

"She was in bed and asleep. I stood by the bed and admired her face. It bore the impression of such simplicity and sweetness—remember it is fifteen years ago that I am speaking of.

"Ethel was sleeping peacefully, and I hesitated to rouse her. And as I stood by her bedside pondering I heard a soft rustling sound over by the heavy wardrobe. I started, and turned and saw what I had not noticed before, a small piece of something white on the floor

"I went across the room and picked it up. It was a piece of paper folded up small, and it had just been put under the door leading to the corridor.

"I felt overcome with agitation. I tried the door and found that Ethel had locked it. This reassured me. I went quietly back into my own room, opened the paper under the light and read its contents.

"It was an assignation for that night. Unsigned, but plain enough for me. It gave instructions as to the meeting-place—the last door on the left of the corridor by the oriel window."

The speaker hesitated, and, turning her face for the first time away from us, peered into the glowing embers in the sinking fire. Then she resumed, appearing to obtain inspiration from her reverie.

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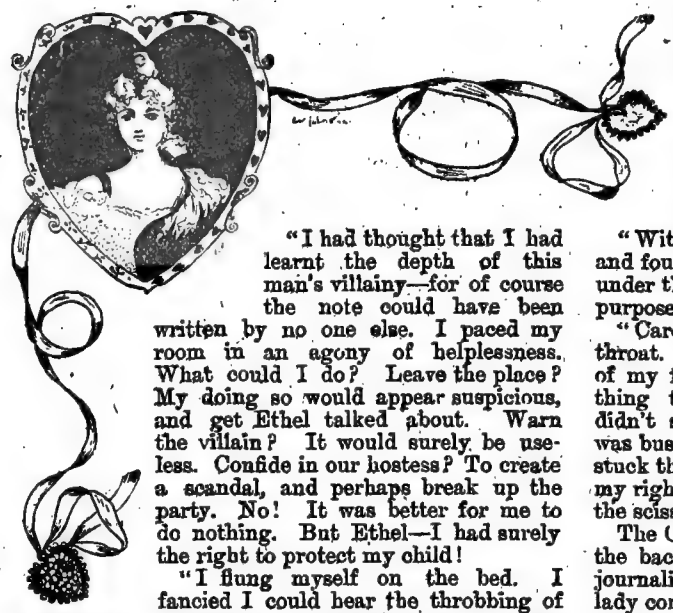

"I had thought that I had learnt the depth of this man's villainy—for of course the note could have been written by no one else. I paced my room in an agony of helplessness. What could I do? Leave the place? My doing so would appear suspicious, and get Ethel talked about. Warn the villain? It would surely be useless. Confide in our hostess? To create a scandal, and perhaps break up the party. No! It was better for me to do nothing. But Ethel—I had surely the right to protect my child!

"I flung myself on the bed. I fancied I could hear the throbbing of my temples. I thought such thoughts as I dare not recall. I conjured up expedients such as are only possible to a desperate woman. I cannot tell how long I lay thus. But when I looked at my watch it pointed to 1.30. I read the note again. It named two o'clock.

"Then I had a new idea. And as it matured in my brain I felt I should act on it. My mind was made up; I would end the tension and protect my child.

"I rose and quietly unlocked the door. I peered out along the corridor. All was still. I went out and closed the door without making a sound. I turned toward the great oriel window, through which the moonbeams fell in brilliant opalescent tints upon the oaken floor. I paused involuntarily, roused by the peaceful beauty of the vista closed in many yards away by that wonderful window.

"Then I crept along on tiptoe, until I had reached the end. I noticed by a glimmer under the last door that there was still a light burning in the room. I paused a moment, nerved myself for the effort I was about to make.

"Cautiously I grasped the handle tightly, and slowly turned it—so slowly as not to make the slightest sound. And then I opened the door and peeped in.

"It was his room. The murderer stood with his back to me before a swing glass; he was dressed in his dinner things. He held a pair of scissors in his hand, with which he was trimming his beard.

"It was the opportunity of a lifetime. My opportunity! And I took it! I ran at him, and before he knew that he was not alone, I had seized him by the throat.

"He didn't call out. He hadn't time. With all the strength of a madwoman I stuck my fingers into his neck until I felt the muscles give. And then I pulled him down until he came on his back, my knees on his chest, and my nails dug deep into his flesh.

"Slowly his features became more and more distorted. His eyes opened wider and wider. His face turned paler even than ever. Then suddenly it began to swell. His eyes became prominent, and his tongue found its way through his teeth, and he had ceased to attempt to struggle. Still clutching at his throat, I glanced round. We were quite alone, he and I, and his reckoning had come.

"Then I saw the scissors he had held, lying by his side. It appeared providential. I renounced the hold of one hand, watching him carefully the while. But he didn't move, and his face grew more livid, more swollen and more hideous every second.

"Without removing my gaze, I felt for the scissors and found them. I grasped them firmly. I passed them under the long white beard. But I could not effect my purpose with one hand.

"Carefully, grudgingly, I withdrew the other from his throat. Still he didn't move, but I noticed the imprint of my fingers on his neck. Then I touched the horrid thing that had caused me disgust so often. But it didn't shock me now. I had a mission to perform and was busy. I held the thing in my left hand, and then stuck the pointed blade of the scissors through it with my right. As I did so the body twitched. Then I closed the scissors quickly."

The Countess drew her breath convulsively, and I felt the back of her chair shake as she shuddered. The journalist covered his face with his hands. But the little lady continued to gaze at the embers and went on in her silvery voice.

"I rose and looked at my work. I felt light-hearted, for my husband was avenged and my daughter protected. And I was quite joyous as I watched a little wavy line of red creep down the embroidered shirt, tinting the diamond stud on its way, until it began to add a new hue to the faded carpet.

"I approved my work and felt relieved. And then I turned to go. And as I did so I recognised that my Nemesis had overtaken me.

"I was about to leave the room, and was already at the door. I half involuntarily turned to take one last look at my work, and, struck by the hideousness of the bloated features—for they had swollen almost immediately—I returned, and taking a towel from the horse, I covered the face up. Then I saw his features peering at me from out the looking glass by which he had stood when I seized him.

"My heart stood still, I looked again. There, all agog with a look of horror in his face; there, as though in the act of falling backward, was the counterfeit of the thing which now lay on the floor. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. I dug my nails into my flesh, and yet it peered. I took my handkerchief and rubbed the mirror. But the ghastly features still fixed me with their gaze.

"Then I became desperate. On the dressing table were a pair of heavy silver candlesticks. I staggered across the room, and, seizing one, with all my might I dashed it at the mirrored head.

"There was a crash. The glass cracked from its centre in all directions, and the great plate flew in a thousand fragments, covering the thing which lay at its base; and I noticed that every little splinter had its portion of counterfeit presentment upon it.

"Then I lost consciousness. Nor do I remember anything more until I found myself in bed, with Ethel, fully dressed, bending over me.

"I was puzzled to find her appearing anxious about me, and her answers only surprised me the more. I learnt from her that she had been awakened shortly after

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one o'clock by my talking in my sleep. She had come to me, but could not rouse me. She remained by my side, and she related how for more than an hour I had muttered and tossed about as if I had been in a high fever. Then I had become quieter and dropped into a heavy sleep. Poor Ethel had sat dosing in my room all night, and was much terrified, as you may imagine.

"And then I realised that it had all been a dream. But it was so vivid that every little detail was engraved on my memory.

"But I dared not speak of what I had dreamed; so I said I had had a nightmare, and could not recall what it was about, and got up and dressed."

"A most horrible dream it was," said the Countess. "I don't ever remember having been so interested."

"It was enough to destroy one's reason," said the journalist.

"But, after all," I added, "it was only a dream."

"There is a little more to be told," said Mrs. Grimstone. "It was, as you say, only a dream. But I have not yet told you the end. Owing to my having slept so late, we did not get down to breakfast until most of the others had finished, and we took ours in company with two or three other late risers, whom we did not know very well.

"As soon as we had finished we went into the great hall to see what the arrangements were. I did not feel very well after my bad night, and hoped there would be a driving party. We found a knot of men in the hall discussing something of evident importance. As we appeared the men separated, and several came to meet us with the usual greetings. But I had seen enough to know there was something very interesting and important going on; so I took young Balmain's arm and led him down the steps to the terrace and asked him if there was any startling news.

"He endeavoured to evade the question, but on my pressing him he owned that there was.

"'The fact of the matter is,' he said, 'if you really want to know, that something has happened to one of our party. At least as he was staying in the house, I suppose he was one of our party. An old gentleman, he has died suddenly.'

"The news didn't startle me in the least, neither did it shock me.

"'Died, you say?' I remarked. 'What did he die of?'

"'Pon my word I can't say,' replied Mr. Balmain. 'He didn't come down to breakfast. And one of the maids said she had been knocking at his door for half an hour and couldn't get any answer. So the butler went up and broke his door open and found him dead.'

"'Or murdered,' I suggested.

"'What makes you say that?' he replied. 'No,' he added, after a pause. 'He wasn't murdered because his door was locked on the inside and his windows were shut and fastened. But if you really want to know, I am told he committed suicide.'

"I felt overcome, but curiosity got the better of me. I felt I must know everything.

"'How did he kill himself?' I demanded.

"'The butler tells me he cut his throat with a pair of scissors,' he said, with a shudder, 'and it's a most extraordinary thing that he didn't rouse the whole house, for as he fell he knocked over a glass, which is broken into bits. It must have made a terrific noise. But then the next room was empty, which I suppose accounts for it.'

"That is all," added Mrs. Grimstone, as we sat without breaking silence. "The necessary forms were gone through, of course, with due consideration to our feelings.

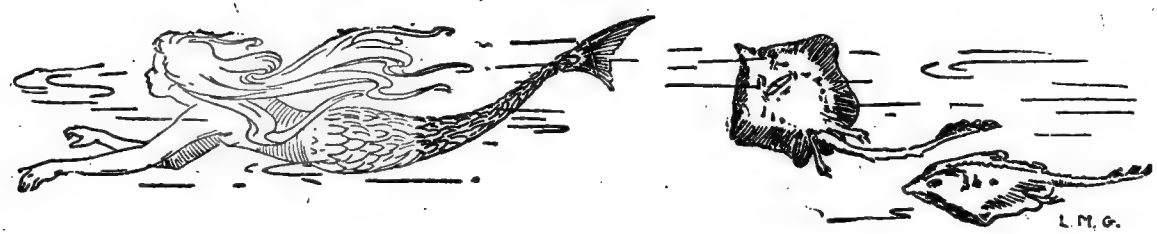
"The body was removed to the village inn, where it was shown beyond doubt that Mr. Joseph—that was his name—had accidentally cut himself with a sharp pair of scissors while trimming his beard. This was proved beyond question by the fragments of white hair they found on the floor, and the scissors which were discovered still lying beside the body, and everybody was satisfied.

"I could not bring myself to go to the Chase for years after that night. But just after Ethel's marriage I was lonely and was persuaded to go and stay with Mrs. Braid for a while. She is a sort of distant connection on my mother's side, you know.

"It was on the second night of my visit, I happened to be in the library and took down a book which was placed on the shelf upside down. The gilt being reversed caught my eye, and I took the book out of its place, and turned it. It was the assignation I had picked up in Ethel's room that awful night. I have it still.

"Then the question struck me with its full force. How much of that night's work was reality, and how much of it a dream? Was it mere imagination on my part, or was it——"

Alfred Mayer.



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THE REALITY OF LOVE.

SUCH a still, beautiful morning! How slowly the sun rose from a couch of crimson! How lazily the one white gauzy cloud floated against the blue of the bending sky, borne aimlessly on by the slow breath of sleeping zephyr, that slept on, nor listed to the love-whispers among the green maples of my garden.

How utterly happy I was! How fair were the white roses bending under their fragrant heaviness of dew!

We had been married two months. Two moons, Douglass called them. We had been away in the mountains, and then my husband had brought me here on the green banks of the beautiful Thames. He had given me this home.

Those fine, straight trees, these lovely flowers, even the very birds and the squirrels were mine, and this great dog with his cold nose thrust into my hand and his brown pathetic eyes following every glance of mine.

I loved Dante, the dog.

I worshipped Douglass, my husband.

I dare say we all of us worship some deity. With some it is a yellow god which men call gold and which women barter their souls for; at other times it is the many-coloured butterfly, Fame, which even hoary-headed men chase about like boys.

Sometimes it is some great being we have conjured from the many myths of the dead past and clothed with a perfection, allied to, but often less than, the perfection of the best man who crossed the orbit of our youth.

When it is this being, classic as Faun, beautiful as Apollo, and omniscient as Proteus, we build a house for his worship and cause exquisite music to be sounded in his honour, and speak aloud words of praise and endearment to him.

And it was somewhat so with me.

My innocence was the church, my love words were his music, and my caresses were as prayers.

And so those two moons had risen, crescented, and fulled, lagged in their coming and gone out in the darkness of night, and we had always been together until this morning.

He had left me for a few hours. It was the first time I had been quite alone with my great joy to look it in the face.

Nor was I quite alone now, for there was Dante, the dog, and there were the birds—my birds—and the white roses and the squirrels in the high trees running about and speaking to each other almost in words.

It was my happiest hour.

All the fears, uncertainties, and perturbations which beset the bride had vanished one by one under the warm tender love of my husband as frost melts under the gentle warmth of a vernal sun; and now love at its fullest and surest and sweetest was ours.

Ah, those dear last hours in the garden with the grave dog, Dante, walking slowly at my side!

Then I grew restless, for you see I had become so used to my joy I was ready to share it again with Douglass.

I wandered into the house.

I prowled about the library. This had been my husband's house some years before he gave it to me.

One of the Fates must have tempted me to fit that key in that lock and open the desk and untie the portfolio and find those love letters from some woman of whom I had never heard.

And to think he had been married before I ever saw him, and had put away a wife to take me!

Some other girl's brown head had rested on his dear breast. The soft arms of some other woman had been about his neck. Red lips had kissed him, as mine had kissed him.

I lived over each hour of our wedded life, but imagined the unknown woman in my place through it all. What torture!

Then I fell on the floor in a swoon, for you see I had never been a very strong girl, and the terrible agony nearly killed me. I think it would have killed me but for the dog—Dante—who licked my face and fastened his strong white teeth in my pretty *robe de maison* and dragged me to the open door, where the fresh, rose-laden air revived me a little, and there the old servant found me and put me to bed, and the doctor came and I——. Well, I remembered no more for long weeks.

I had brain fever, and they say the dog would stand beside me with real tears falling from his brown eyes when I was so near to death.

That was a long time ago.

Yes, he says it was wrong to keep it from me, but he thought it best.

And it seems that she rejected him because, in her fickleness, she fell in love with another.

He had forgiven her, and he had never looked with love on another woman since, till he met me on that frosty Valentine's Day and began to woo me.

And the other woman had been dead five years. You see, Douglass is much older than I am. And I honour him for his constancy.

And the dog, Dante?

He seems gayer than he used, but he likes better than anything to sit beside the cradle, and when baby moves in his sleep he swings him gently till he is quiet again.

AGNES RAYNE.

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To the person whose attempt is correct we will pay the sum of **£1,000.**

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In the event of two or more persons being correct, the £1,000 will be divided amongst them. This condition applies also to the £25 for the newsagent or bookstall clerk, the £5 for the boys, and £10 for each of the persons who sign the winning coupons.

One competitor may send in any number of attempts, but each coupon must be signed by five persons under the conditions mentioned above.

It must be clearly understood that all persons who enter for this competition must abide by the decision of the Editor in any question that may arise in connection with the competition.

As a guide to your estimate we give below the number of Births and Deaths which have taken place in the thirty-three largest towns in the United Kingdom for the corresponding period for the past three years.

The figures as published by the Registrar-General will be taken as correct. On December 2nd, 1898, a competition similar to this was declared legal by the Appeal Court.

Registered during the Week Ending April 25th, 1896.		Registered during the Week Ending April 24th, 1897.		Registered during the Week Ending April 23rd, 1898.	
Births.	Deaths.	Births.	Deaths.	Births.	Deaths.
6,783	4,062	6,226	3,965	7,202	3,905

All attempts to be addressed to the Editor, Short Stories, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and the envelope to be marked in the left-hand corner with the word: "Births."

THE COMPETITION CLOSES ON MONDAY, APRIL 17th.

THIS PRIZE IS OFFERED IN CONJUNCTION WITH "PEARSON'S WEEKLY," "HOME NOTES," "SUNDAY READER," "BIG BUDGET," "PICK-ME-UP," AND "PASTIMES."

Mademoiselle Gotte.

"No; I ask your Majesty's pardon, but that is not right at all. Gotte is a respectable girl, but a terrible flirt, who is trying to tease her lover. For that reason the gestures must be livelier, and there should be more pettishness shown when the soubrette throws down her embroidery, 'There, your ruffles can wait before I touch them again.' Remember, madam, that it is defiance thrown to the valet Lafleur, who, by-the-way, takes it quite unconcernedly."

"Well, my dear Dazincourt, and how is it that you say nothing to me? Did I not get through my grand tirade very well?"

"Perfectly, monseigneur; I have nothing but praise to give you. Your highness carries a napkin over your arm with an ease that would make the valets of the Comedie Française wild with envy."

"One would think that I had served at the tables of grand seigneurs all my life; is it not so, Antionette?"

"Do not ask me, my brother d'Artois, I am positively jealous. You get all the praise, while for me there is nothing but scolding. Is it my fault that I am poor in my *rôle?* Elizabeth will tell you that I do not know it yet, and, besides, M. Campan discourages me."

From the depths of the orchestra, plunged in darkness, comes a big voice and a hearty laugh.

"Do not hunt for any more excuses, Antionette. M. Dazincourt is right; you are too imposing, too majestic. If the *rôle* of queen is familiar to you, that of soubrette is somewhat of a novelty."

The actress thus spoken to, leaned over the footlights.

"Do not be afraid, sire, I shall do better, I am sure. And while Elizabeth and Madame de Podignax are rehearsing their scene I will go and study my part in the garden."

The reader has, perhaps understood that this is the theatre of the Trianon, where they are rehearsing the *Gageure Imprévue*, that pretty comedy of Sedaine's which has not grown old, and which we even yet listen to with pleasure. The actors on this occasion are Queen Marie Antionette, Madam Elizabeth, the Countess Diane de Polignac, and Counte d'Artois, and M. d'Adhemar. The public—the King of France, the only spectator admitted to these rehearsals. There is at this time in all France a rage after plays, and the Queen, too, has been seized with the contagion; so, at a short distance from the little Trianon, she had built a pretty little box of a theatre lined with blue velvet.

Lagrence had painted the ceiling, and Dazincourt, from the Comédie Française, was ordered by the first gentleman of the chamber to give his advice to the distinguished amateurs. They could not have made a better choice than this combination of actor and man of the world, who began life as secretary to the Marechal de Richelieu and who was honoured by the friendship of the Abbé de Vaisenon.

You should have seen the alert little provençal, with his laughing face and sparkling eyes, as he strode the stage of the little theatre, and filled with scrupulous conscientiousness the functions of stage manager and instructor.

Simple mortals often get headaches when they are annoyed, and the Queen of France had certainly the right to feel vexed after so unsatisfactory a rehearsal. With heightened colour, then, she went at a rapid pace across the corner of the garden, bordered with orange trees—the only concession made to Lenotre's taste in the park of the Trianon. This time the daughter of Marie Therese did not wish to have it said, as one impertinent person had remarked, after the representation of the "Devin du Village," that it was played as badly as only royalty can play.

Book in hand, she earnestly studied her part, and is so completely absorbed that she nearly fell into a fountain from which arose a corpulent Silenus.

Decidedly, for the purpose of study, thought she, one would be better off in English gardens, since there is no chance of meeting anyone there.

Leaving on her left the hedges, the Queen crossed the little bridge thrown over the grotto, and passing on through the pavilion, where the Countesse Dubarry had often come to drink coffee with Louis XV., she entered the Swiss valley so full of attractive surprises.

Marie Antionette detested the straight walks of the Versailles park; and here nothing pleased her more than to fish in the pond, to see the cows milked, to run along the paths where chalets, temples, rivers, and lains were clustered within a space of forty acres at most. Rousseau had made pastoral simplicity the fashion, and in laying out these English gardens people imagined

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they were closely approaching Nature, while in reality nothing was ever more artificial.

While she walked the Queen continued to declaim her role.

"'My poor Lafleur, do not trouble yourself to reveal all the treasures of your mind; to madam you will never seem anything but a fool.' There, that time I caught the right intonation, and my severe professor himself——"

She stopped astonished, for from a neighbouring thicket a man suddenly arose. His head was bare, his cravat disordered, his clothes were covered with dust, and as he gazed at her with haggard eyes his appearance was by no means reassuring. In spite of that it was not fright that showed itself on Marie Antionette's face.

"What do you mean by walking here?" she asked in a haughty tone, quite different from that which Mdlle. Gotte had just employed while teasing M. Lafleur.

"I am an unfortunate man who has no other recourse than death if no one takes pity on him."

The dejected appearance of the man, accorded so well with his words that the Queen continued in a softer tone:

"But did you not see the notice attached to the gates? 'By order of the Queen the public are forbidden to enter this inclosure.' How was it the Swiss guard let you come in here at all?"

"I did not ask permission; a man who has lost his head does not trouble himself much about Swiss guards. Let the Queen send me to prison if I have disobeyed her orders. They tell me, however, that she is good-hearted, and if I could only see her, who knows, perhaps I might find means to interest her. But there is no chance; no one ever sees the Queen but at a distance in royal robes of gold and silver, and covered with precious stones."

"So, you are quite sure of that?"

"Yes, indeed; just as sure as I am at this moment of seeing a charming little person in a white gown, a fichu of gauze, and a big straw hat, which in my opinion hides altogether too much of her pretty hair. In fact you inspire me with confidence, and it will perhaps soothe me if I tell you my troubles."

"Just as you would confide them to the Queen, I suppose."

"Exactly. Well, first you must know that I am a gentleman. I am called the Chevalier d'Orville—by the way, what is your name?"

An amusing idea suggested itself to the Queen. "Mdlle. Gotte, at your service," she said, with a courtesy.

"What a funny name. But come, confess, Mdlle. Gotte, that you took me just now for a robber, or at least a vagabond. I am sure my neglected toilet would suggest it, but I have little heart now for such things. Though don't forget that, while I have no claim to ride in the King's coaches, I am good and even of noble family.

"Long before the reign of Francis I. my family was founded in Dauphine, and we plume ourselves on being connected with Bayard, the chevalier, 'without fear and without reproach.' But no matter for that; I am poor enough now to give points to Job, and not a soul in the world is interested in me.

"Formerly an officer in the King's army, a wound rendered me unfit for service, and for the last four years I have begged in vain for a modest place as collector of taxes. But those in authority only laugh at me; and at the moment when I thought I had accomplished my purpose a luckier rival, who had powerful protectors, succeeded instead of the poor provincial. The Minister does me nothing but injustice."

"But, chevalier, do you not know that Ministers are created expressly for that purpose?"

"Hush, you foolish girl; do you dare say such things in the Queen's garden? Just suppose you should be overheard! Well, I endure my poverty after the fashion. I continue to vegetate, spending the night in copying music as M. Rousseau did, and ordinarily I do not complain; but this last misfortune is a little too much. I love and am loved by the prettiest girl named Lucette. She has wonderful eyes, a figure and a foot as small as that which I see within your rosetted slipper. Why do you blush, Mdlle. Gotte? I have no intention of offending you."

"Well," said the haughty Antionette, less offended in reality than d'Orville supposed, "you are not unhappy after all, since you are beloved. What prevents your marrying Mdlle. Lucette?"

"For the simple reason that she is no richer than I am, and her cruel mother pretends that she must marry a wealthy man. She would have been mine already had I suceeded in getting that appointment; but I am worse off now than ever. They gave me hope that I might be appointed Receiver of Taxes at Grenoble, my native village; but as I came out from an interview with the Minister a young clerk announced to me, with a malicious stare that the place had been already promised to a protégé of the Marechal de Luxembourg.

"And just think how unfortunate I am. The worst of all is that this intriguing rival of mine is also courting Lucette. There was left but one last resource for me, and that was to try and see M. Campan, the Queen's librarian, who was once a friend of the family. I rushed through the Rue des Reservoirs to the Trianon. M. Campan was not at the château, they told me he was walking in the park, where I would surely find him; but for an hour I have looked in vain, and I feel that all is lost.

"No doubt my rival will obtain Lucette's hand. Poor girl, she weeps in secret, but she does not dare to openly disobey her terrible mother. But I could not survive for her to be another's; and since both ambition and love fail me, I shall leave a world where honest men win nothing but contumely and disappointment."

"Listen, M. d'Orville, one should never give up hope for the future and abandon himself to despair. Perhaps I also have some credit at the Court as well as M. Campan, and I shall struggle if it be possible, against the influence of the Marechal de Luxembourg. Since you have confided in me, give me your petition and your service papers."

"What; you will? Ah, Mdlle. Gotte, my protectress, my good angel, it is Heaven itself that has brought about this meeting, and just, too, when I was on the point of upbraiding Providence. Now I understand; you are attached to the person of the Queen; you see her, you speak to her every day; it is she, I am sure, whom you hope to interest in my fate."

And as the pretended Gotte did not answer, he continued, sotto voce:

"Surely, my friend the chevalier, you are nothing but a fool; where are your wits? Don't you see the paper which she holds in her hands? Just now, too, I heard her declaiming as she walked. The thing is clear. The noble carriage of the head, this charming face, can belong to no one but one of the stars of the Comédie Française. Pardon me, mademoiselle, but I am a provincial who has never put foot in a theatre, and knows

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little more than the road from Grenoble to Versailles. How Lucette and I will bless you and pray for you till our dying days."

And the enthusiastic d'Orville threw himself on his knees, seized the pretty hand, which was covered with a silken mitten, and pressed upon it a fervent kiss.

Just at this moment one of the Trianon guards showed himself at the head of the walk, and the Queen quickly withdrew her hand. "I beg you not to seek to learn my name," she said. "Leave for Dauphine at once, and you will soon have news from me."

Thereupon she ran off; her pretty figure vanished among the thickets, while the chevalier stood immovable—stunned and dazed by such unhoped-for good luck.

The rehearsal was nearly ended, and they were waiting for the Queen to go over the scene which Dazincourt was not satisfied with. This time, however, everything went perfectly. A mischievous smile played on the beautiful red lips of the Austrian, and the prospect of making others happy brought brilliant light into the large grey eyes of the august soubrette.

"Bravo, Antionette!" cried the single spectator from the orchestra, "that is natural and lively; well done, indeed! Now we have an excellent Gotte. Do you not agree with me, Dazincourt?"

"Ah, sire, I only wish I had more pupils who possessed such prompt intelligence as that of her Majesty."

The Queen joyfully clapped her hands.

"Sire, since you are satisfied, let me beg a favour. I have something to ask of the Controller-General of your finances."

"The deuce! But, no matter, provided it is not too large a sum—for, you know, Antionette, the treasury is none too rich at present."

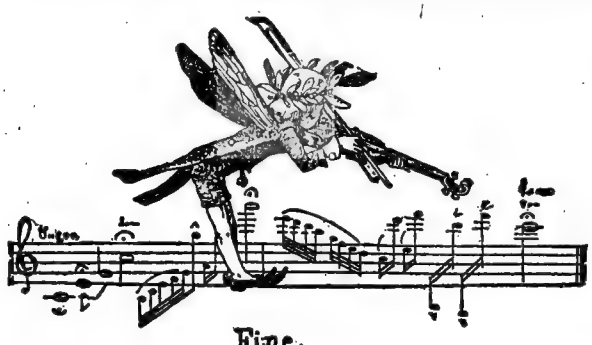
"It has nothing whatever to do with money, sire, and the matter is less important than you suppose. Will your Majesty accompany me to the hamlet? And while we walk I will tell you a story."

* * * * *

A change of scene.

No more artificial country, for once more Nature has regained her rights. A lonely ravine, in the neighbourhood of Grenoble, its steep sides dotted with pine-trees, while the River Isere rushes through with tempestuous waters amidst mossy and broken rocks. From the further bank of the river the mountain slopes down, and the village of Voreppe shows itself in the distance half revealing its scattered dwellings and smiling meadows.

Standing on the bridge thrown over the Isere, a man seems to be intently watching. It is the Chevalier d'Orville.



Fine.

Reaching home a week ago he has since tried in vain to obtain a rendezvous with Lucette.

But already dusk is veiling the rugged hillsides that mount toward the Grande-Chartreuse; one can no longer distinguish the road that branches from the king's highway, from Lyons to Grenoble, and loses itself in a deep gorge before it scales the height whereon stands the great monastry.

And still Lucette does not come. Is she, perhaps, afraid to trust him so late in this lonely spot? The chevalier is in deep despair, and is about to turn back when a shadow flits at a rapid pace across the wooden bridge.

At last it is she! And d'Orville rapidly advanced to greet his well-beloved.

"What has detained you so long?" he cried, as they exchanged greetings.

Quite out of breath the young girl threw herself on the mossy bank.

"At one time," she said, "I feared that I could not come at all. My mother was suspicious, and never lost sight of me for one moment. But the idea of causing you disappointment gave me courage at last. Pretending a slight headache, I went up early to my room. There I awaited the coming of night, and by the aid of a rope from the window, and the key of the garden which I had taken, I managed to escape."

"How can I thank you sufficiently, my darling? Nothing was wanted but your beloved presence to give me back hope. I can't describe to you what the separation has cost me. So, for pity's sake, let me kiss you once more."

"But would it be right now that all is changed? You must know that to-day your rival appeared at our house in a triumphant mood. He declared that he had obtained the place which meant so much to us, and nothing remains but to fix the day of the marriage. Alas! How can I, a feeble creature, resist the whole family? If I am alone here to-night, it is only that I must warn you of our coming misfortune. Be strong, be courageous, my dear d'Orville. Say to yourself that though they may constrain Lucette to this marriage, they can never take away her heart, that is beyond recall."

"Very well," said d'Orville angrily, "be as resigned as you please since it seems to come so easy to you, but for my part I cannot endure life without you. I know what is left for me to do."

"For pity's sake do not look at me with such angry eyes; do not speak to me in such a tone. What have I done to merit such severity?" she sorrowfully asked.

"Oh! pardon me, Lucette. My sorrow makes me unjust. I am wicked to torment you so, but if you only knew. I suffer all the more since for an instant I had a dream of happiness, and a ray of hope crossed my sad horizon. It is only a few days ago that in the park of the Trianon I met an unknown lady, to whom I related my trouble, and she of her own accord offered me her protection. She was so noble, so charming, she appeared so sincere that I readily trusted to her promises; but, alas, I see now that she has forgotten me entirely."

"How do you know that she is not still thinking of you? Wait a little before you abandon all hope, and above all, my dear d'Orville, promise me that you will make no attempt on your life."

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He did not answer, and she rested her trembling hand on his shoulder, caressing him with her look and murmuring such words as mothers use to soothe their children. Under the magnetic charm of her beloved voice and touch d'Orville felt, little by little, the keenness of his sorrow abate. After all, how delightful it was to roam thus hand in hand in the soft light of the rising moon.

At the gates of Grenoble they were forced at last to separate, and in spite of Lucette's prayers d'Orville passed the greater part of the night in writing letters and putting his papers in order, as if he were preparing to leave the world. Towards morning, harassed with fatigue and exhausted with emotion, he threw himself on the bed and slept heavily until the door of his room was noisily opened.

"Quick, M. d'Orville, open your eyes. Here is a letter and a package for you." And the worthy widow, proprietor of the hotel where d'Orville stayed, held out a large envelope bearing the Royal seal, and a box which seemed to contain jewels. Still half asleep the chevalier nonchalently broke the great red seal. After reading the enclosure d'Orville grew as pale as if he were about to faint, for the letter enclosed his commission as Receiver of Taxes at Grenoble, and the box a pair of beautiful diamond earrings that came from Boehmer, the Queen's jeweller. A paper folded within the box contained these words: "For Mademoiselle Lucette, from Mademoiselle Gotte."

Without thinking of his attire or his hostess, who fled dismayed, d'Orville sprang out of bed, and ten minutes later was at his loved one's door making a terrible noise. In a wrapper and night cap Lucette's mother presently put her head out of the window.

"Madame," cried the breathless chevalier, "I come to ask you for Mademoiselle Lucette's hand."

"What, again? You have the impudence to show yourself again here, when I forebade you to come near the house? Go on your way. My daughter is not intended for starvelings of your kind."

"But, madame, I am no longer a starveling; I have obtained the place of Receiver of Taxes, which you yourself made the condition of our marriage."

"You are an imposter, sir. You are too late. We saw only yesterday the real Receiver of Taxes, and it is he that will marry Lucette."

"Confound it. This is a little too much, madame. Open the door just for a minute, and I can prove the truth of what I say, for I have the commission in my pocket at this moment."

Lucette who had overheard this colloquy, quietly opened the door, and explanations were soon satisfactorily made. The ambitious mother no longer had reason to oppose her daughter's happiness.

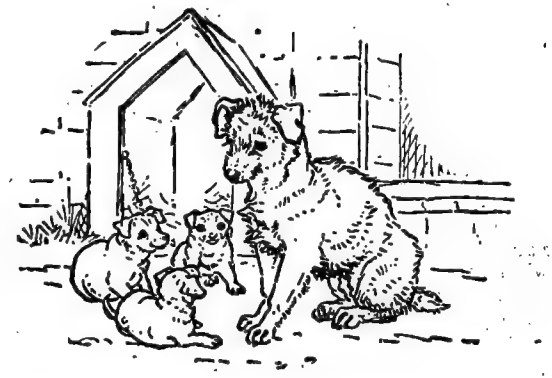
"It is very well, chevalier," said Lucette, while she tried on her beautiful earrings which her intended had brought with him; "there is still something wanting to my happiness, and that is not to be able to thank our generous benefactress, or even to know to whom to offer our thanks. Is it not too bad?"

"Don't distress yourself about that, my dear girl. As soon as we are married we will go to Paris, and I shall find means to discover Mdlle. Gotte at Versailles or the Trianon."

* * * * *

But the trip, postponed from day to day for various reasons, was not carried out.

The cares of the household soon absorbed Lucette's attention, and the Chevailier was too fond of his wife to leave her for any length of time.



The years rolled by, and the happy couple lived peaceably at Grenoble without perceiving the flight of time or the great changes that were taking place in the nation. In fact, they were approaching the last days of 1793. The King of France was dead on the scaffold, and the Queen Marie Antionette was waiting her fate in the prison of the Temple.

One evening the Chevalier d'Orville entered his home much excited.

"Here is grand news, Lucette," he said, "a relation of my mother's has just died and left me all the property. I must positively go to Paris to see about the inheritance, and now that our children are old enough to be left behind, you must not refuse to go with me. I know that the capital is not very gay just now, but we will not stay longer than is necessary to arrange this business."

On the morrow Lucette and her husband mounted the coach that took three days and nights to reach the Rue du Boulio. In spite of the sadness that reigned throughout the capital, Madame d'Orville found much to admire, since it was her first visit to the great city.

The busy throng on the boulevards, the Palais Royal with its shops of all kinds, and the great promenade through the park of the Tuileries, where were to be seen the astounding toilettes of the "divinities" of that day.

Besides, she did not lose hope of meeting their protectress, and when she saw a beautiful woman of noble appearance she turned a questioning glance to her husband, and d'Orville answered by a negative glance.

She had done this for the twentieth time, when he said: "You must remember, Lucette, that it is useless to ask me this. Mdlle. Gotte must have been a friend of the Queen and a fervent royalist, and I hope sincerely that she is now far from Paris For my own part I do not feel at ease here. It is true I see displayed at all the corners of the streets, 'Liberty and Fraternity,' but in spite of that it seems to me that I am surrounded by a pack of ravening wolves. Happily, I have finished my business with the notary, and if you are ready we will leave to-morrow for Dauphine.

"To-day, since there is nothing better to do, I will take you to dine at Meots, the famous restaurant of the Rue Saint-Honore. Let us hurry or we may meet the dreary procession that is to pass about four o'clock on the way to the guillotine, and I am anxious, if possible, to spare you the dismal sight."

But already both sides of the street were so crowded that they made their way with much difficulty. Never

and such a crowd massed itself in and about the Rue Saint-Honore.

They arrived at last at Meots restaurant, where every window and doorway was packed with a crowd of curious sightseers.

Ragged and hideous wretches elbowed deputies of the Convention and presidents of the Jacobin Clubs, members of the Revolutionary Committee, and, in fact, representatives of all Paris were there.

But even as they reached the spot the jolting of the approaching cart could distinctly be heard, and presently the gendarmes who proceeded it appeared round the corner.

"Too late," sorrowfully cried the chevalier. "In spite of all, we must see this horrible sight. But above all, Lucette, do not faint, or they may take you for a 'suspect.'"

The crowd was hushed as though at last appalled at what was going on with their sanction, and only the horrible cries and oaths of the bloodthirsty hirelings of the Revolutionary Committee were to be heard.

The cart advanced slowly, and instead of the usual hecatomb of victims, one saw only a single woman seated on the bench where the condemned men were usually placed. Her black garments and white hair showed afar off underneath this pale autumn sky.

Fascinated in spite of themselves, d'Orville and his wife made their way little by little through the crowd, and the dismal vehicle came so near the two that it almost brushed against them in passing. A cry, stifled by the noise of the streets, escaped from the chevalier.

She was there before him in that loathsome cart—she, the beautiful girl of the Trianon.

With her hands clasped and resting on her knees, lost to her surroundings and insensible to further outrage, Marie Antionette seemed no longer of the earth. The long braids of golden hair, the dazzling eyes, the red lips, the lustre and beauty of these sorrows were dimmed and almost effaced. Alas, how soon the guillotine would change that too; d'Orville stifling with emotion, pressed Lucette's arm.

"Look, there she is!"

Then, turning their backs on the crowd, which moved on like a great flood towards the place of execution, he drew his companion away.

They entered the Hotel Warwick, Rue de la Loi, where they had taken lodgings; and while the Queen of France was being beheaded on the scaffold, d'Orville and Lucette invoked divine compassion for the unhappy woman who had made them so happy, and who herself had been doomed to suffer such misfortune, such fearful tortures of mind and body.

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BOAT RACE COMPETITION.

On Saturday, March 25th, the Oxford v Cambridge Boat Race will take place. There is every reason to believe that the contest will be an exciting one, and so that our readers might take additional interest in the National event we offer a Prize of £5 to the sender of the coupon, printed below, giving most nearly correct: (1) The Winning Boat; (2) the distance separating the two boats at the finish; (3) the time taken by the winning boat in the race. The third condition will only be used to decide the actual winner of the prize in the event of more than one giving equally correct answers to the other two questions.

The Judges' decision of the race will be our standard for making the award.

Having filled up the coupon to your thinking, sign your name and address in the space provided on the left, and get two friends to sign their names and addresses on the right. In the event of your winning the prize they will each receive £1. Competitors may send in any number of attempts, all of which may be signed by the same witnesses.

Up to the present time fifty-five races have been rowed. Oxford have won thirty-two and Cambridge twenty-two races, the 1877 contest being a dead heat. Oxford have won the races for the past nine years, their times being from a minimum of 18min. 47sec. to a maximum of 22min. 15sec., and their wins during that time from half-a-length to thirteen lengths.

All envelopes containing coupons should be addressed: "Boat Race Competition," *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach us not later than the first post, Wednesday, March 22nd.

The Competition is run in conjunction with *PASTIMES*.

"SHORT STORIES" BOAT RACE COMPETITION COUPON.

TIME OF WINNING BOAT:

Winning Boat: .....

Min. / **Sec.**

Distance Won by: .....

Competitor. .....

Witnesses. .....

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BOOK IV.—CONCERNING A SOJOURN - - AMONGST THE DAJIANS.

CHAPTER IV.

How Sneyd and O'Neill decided to annex Ebry's quarters: how they returned to the mountain camp, and learnt of Norah's abduction: and how they schemed future plans.

"Av Misther Ebry had had that cap fitted on to his ugly sconce two months ago," O'Neill remarked, "we should have been saved a hape of throuble."

The body of the unfortunate sorcerer lay on the ground before them. Attached to it was the head of the great snake cut off at the neck by a dozen haggling blows of a heavy wooden sword. They had tried to pull the two apart but the serpent's teeth had their points turned inwards, so that the reptile could not disgorge his prey of his own accord when alive, and they were unable to drag the victim away even when the powerful jaw muscles were relaxed in death. So the long fangs remained planted in the wrinkled skin of the man's neck, and the head remained hidden from view.

"It is a ghastly burying-place," Sneyd said. "But when one calls to mind some of the wretch's feats during his lifetime, there is a certain grim appropriateness about it."

"What was he doing here I wonder?" said O'Neill.

"The devil turns up at unexpected places, to quote one of Oleron's sententious remarks," replied Sneyd. "But still, I must confess it does surprise me to find this, his very worthy representative, here. The devil's I mean, not honest King Oleron's. He doesn't seem to have got into very snug quarters either. This hut is evidently the erection of a few hours, and the locality is the reverse of pleasant. He has pitched his camp near a couple of banana trees I notice; but I've rather gathered the impression that, like us, he's keeping away from the public gaze."

"It's in hidin' the old blayguard was here, beyond a doubt," replied the Irishman. "Who'd come to such an outlandish place otherwise? The hut is, as you say, just run up nohow. Wather oozes up over one's fut when yez stand on the flure, an' barrin' this calabash, which, by the smell's held something sthronger than cowld tay, there's not a thing about the place. An' av yez notice, the wee clearin's a natural one: an' what's more, it has'nt been thrampled on much. He's come to it racently. And what's more he's mostly stayed here since he came. There's no thrace of a path leadin' anywhere. There's futsteps to the banana-clump, futsteps here, futsteps there; all aisy to see in the black mud; but barrin' this one place here, where he comes in, and this other place here where we arrived, there's not a thrace of any one goin' either in or out. So when I said that Misther Ebry was just kapin' out of the way, it's the truth I was tellin', an' no lie about it."

"Well," said Sneyd, "if Ebry pitched on the place for that purpose, we may be sure it isn't likely to be disturbed. He was a great rascal, beyond doubt; but he was an undeniably clever rascal. Don't you think we had better shift down here?"

The Irishman looked dubious. "I don't think it's over safe," he remarked at last. "This low swampy place 'ud be full of fevers an' agues, and calentures. An' us wid a woman too! D'ye know I'm thinkin' that the mountain's the safer place for us, by no small deal."

"But," said Sneyd, somewhat impatiently; "we don't want a permanent residence on this cursed island. If we did, I agree with you that the higher ground would be the more healthy. But our great object is to slip away as soon as ever we get the chance. Our present camp is too far from the coast. We could never hope to march down from there, find a canoe, and get clear away to sea, without being discovered. We must feel our way forward gradually, and I don't think we could better this for a first stage. It is perfectly hidden, and we aren't known to be in this neighbourhood at all. And besides, there is abundance of both food and water—of a sort—and these are great desiderata. However strong a fort we may pitch upon, it would be useless to us if we had to capitulate to starvation."

"You're right," said the Irishman with a sigh; "an' it's meself that ought to have seen that same at once. But I'm in such a constant worry and fidget about that poor wee Norah, that I've got a head on me that for brains would do discredit to a stone statue. Let's get back and bring her down at once."

The return journey was hard enough, but it was child's play to the struggle they had experienced before. Chance led them through a part of the forest where the undergrowth was less rankly luxurious, and where a passage might be pressed through, with not much more than ordinary effort. But even here the exertion was sufficiently great to make a periodical rest imperative. However, they got into the open country at last, and being unburdened, save for a small bunch of bananas apiece—just sufficient to give Norah one meal—they moved along pretty rapidly, in spite of their exhaustion and fatigue. It was still daylight, and they wanted to reach their old camp before the sun went down.

"It won't do to have the darkness falling upon us," Sneyd had said. "It will be as black as ink for the first few

hours, and we should be certain to miss the way. If, however, we get there before the sun sets, you and I can snatch a bit of rest, and then the three of us can be off again when the moon rises."

"Which should be just about midnight," O'Neill added.

And so they trudged along.

Their temporary home was snugly hidden. It would not come into view till they were close beside it. But there was a point just beside it which commanded a full mile of the path they had come along, and on this Norah had said she would await their return. As soon as this ridge came in sight, they turned their eyes upon it. But there was no Norah in sight. The Irishman's anxiety returned to him in an instant, and he gave vent to it in words. Sneyd too was conscious of an unaccountable sinking of heart, but he stifled its gloomy forebodings and answered cheerfully enough.

"We've been far longer than we intended, you must remember," he said. "Poor girl, she got tired of waiting for us, and went inside to lie down."

"Av she thought we were beyond our time, she'd naturally begin to think we'd got into some difficulty. An' av that same got into her pretty head, it's not lyin' down she'd be afther. Faith, man, that'd be the very rayson to kape her on the look-out. Bad scran to't, I'm afraid there's something wrong."

Fagged though they were, their pace had unconsciously increased, and they were dragging their weary limbs over the rough ground at a heavy trot.

They came up to the ridge and hailed. There was no reply. They went on towards the rude stone hut. Their worst fears were realised. With useless malignity it had been torn down, and the very stones were scattered far and wide —and of Norah, not a trace was to be seen.

O'Neill threw himself on the ground, and covered his face with his hands. Strong man though he was, he sobbed like a child. But his grief found no exit in words.

Sneyd, though deeply touched, had not received such a cruel wound. His faculties were sharpened rather than dulled by the blow, and after thoroughly and heartily anathematising poor Norah's abductors, he set about looking for any traces they might have left behind them.

There could be no two questions about the manner of the girl's departure. If she had wandered off alone, and had been unable for some reason or other to retrace her steps, the hut would have remained intact. But here it was torn down piecemeal, and scattered about in an ecstasy of savage rage. Dajian workmanship was plainly written over the ruin.

The next point was, what had happened to her? Was she still alive, as a prisoner? Had she been killed? Or, had she had warning of the intrusion in time, and managed to effect her escape? Sneyd dismissed the last of these three surmises with a sigh. He could not be sanguine enough to think it possible. There were forty incontrovertible reasons against it. He did not, however, believe that she was killed. The Dajians were cruel and merciless, and would not stick at the murder of a woman. But he thought that they would spare her life, for the present. Not through any motives of chivalry. But because a woman's corpse would be but little use to them in a woodless mountain solitude; whereas down below, at their village——but that is a matter that need be pursued no further. Suffice it to say, that Laurence Sneyd believed that Norah was still alive, but a prisoner.

Having gone through this course of induction, he tried to rouse O'Neill from his abandonment of grief, by repeating it to him stage by stage. At first the Irishman listened dully. He was too stunned by grief to let the words go thoroughly home. They fell upon his ear, but made little impression. But by degrees he shook off his preoccupation, and listened more attentively, and by the time Sneyd had finished speaking, he was more like his own shrewd self.

"I believe what yez say, that she's a prisoner in the hands of these filthy savages, poor girl," he said. "But tell me honestly now, is there a chance of her life being spared?"

"Whilst there's life there's hope, as the doctors say."

"Y'are bidding me hope, just to soften the blow. Say now, on yer honour as a gentleman, do you think she will be left alive?"

Sneyd shook his head sorrowfully. "I'm afraid not," he said.

O'Neill made reply coolly, deliberately, and without a trace of passion in his voice. "Now, hear me. I love that poor wee girl as man seldom loved woman yet. I could live widout her, I daresay, but I don't want to. You've been a good shipmate to me—the best I've ever had—but we must part here. Get you back to Erma. With luck you'll do it, an' it's me wish that you'll have every prosperity. For meself, I'll stay here. Directly those brutes kill—murther her, then there's war between me an' them, till they manage to get hold o' me."

"There's one part of your programme which won't be carried out."

"Which?" asked the Irishman, with lowering brow. "D'ye think I'm goin' to let them get hold o' me, before I've revenged her bitterly?"

"Don't lose your temper. I wasn't thinking of that. I was merely going to say, that your cool suggestion for my desertion wasn't going to be carried out, because I simply and flatly refuse to go. Man! do you think I'm such a cur as to go away, after what that girl has done? Didn't she save me at the temple with you? Should I be here now, if it wasn't for her? If they murder her, I will help you deal out a fitting punishment; and when that has been done, then we may talk of separating, if you wish it. But till then, I again emphatically refuse to leave."

O'Neill held out a hard, brown, open hand. "Put it there," he said simply; and the two men exchanged one of those hand-grips which speak a week's talk in a minute.

There was silence for a while, and then Sneyd broke it.

"It is no use to begin the matter wildly. They are many, we are only two. We must have method in our action. We must begin by finding out to which part of the island Norah has been taken. The ground here is hard, and will leave no tracks. Besides, bare feet do not make scratches on stone like hob-nailed boots might. Now unless they have come directly over the summit, the men that raided this camp to-day must have come up from the valleys on this side. Two of these, we have found, are unclimbable. The third we have ourselves just come out of, and therefore it may be set aside. The fourth, that which holds the little plateau above the waterfall, which we defended so mercilessly before, is the likeliest. They have climbed up into it—and the very fact of their doing such a thing, shows them to have pluck, which must not be despised—have climbed on, and knowing the country have guessed the way we took, and followed it successfully. We were fools to have overlooked the fact that they might take such a course; but it is too late to waste regrets over that now.

"Well, we must go down to that little plateau, and on down the fall, into the valley. There we must look about us. There should be tracks both on the plateau and below too, if they have gone that way. If there are signs which tell us such is the case, we must feel our way on and find more; and if there aren't, well, we shall have learnt that they have gone in another direction, and must set ourselves to find out which it is.

"And now, to sleep. There won't be any moon till midnight, and we can't find our way till then. So up till that time, let us get all the rest we can. Try and not let your thoughts keep you awake. Remember every tittle of strength and endurance is of value now."

Sneyd's cool dispassioned reasoning had calmed the Irishman's fierce passion down, as he had intended it should.

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His violent grief no longer bubbled over with hysterical violence. His resolve was unchanged, but he saw that cool calculation was necessary, if it was to be carried out, and so compelled himself, by sheer force of will, to do as prudence dictated. He had honestly wished his companion to leave him to his fate. But when the ex-cornet so stoutly refused to go, O'Neill felt that after all, black though they seemed, affairs might even yet change for the better. Presumably Norah was not dead yet. She was being kept alive for a purpose that made him shudder, even to think about. But still she was alive; and there was comfort in that old doctors' truism: There was hope whilst life remained.

CHAPTER V.

How Sneyd and O'Neill followed up Norah and her captors little by little: how they arrived in the nick of time at a certain hut: how the Dajians tried to roast them out: and how they walked through the flames unscathed.

The two white men were peering from behind a great boulder that had fallen from the heights above, and had lodged in the nip of a tiny gorge. At their backs were the grim rocks, black with shadow. Below them was the little plateau, when they had gathered sea-fowls' eggs. Its feathered residents were having a bad time now. The materials of their nests were blazing from a dozen great watch-fires, and most of their eggs, and many of themselves, had gone to fill a hundred hungry stomachs. Some of the savages were grouped round the fires sleeping, the rest were doing diligent sentry-duty. The locality had its fateful remembrances green in their minds, and they had no wish to be surprised and entrapped.

The two watchers had taken in every item of the situation. From far away up on the mountain side, they had seen the yellow tongues of flames shooting up from the fires, and drawing nearer, they had been able to distinguish the dark bodies beside them. Then summer lightning had begun to blaze in the sky; and fearful lest they should be seen during one of the flashes, and so put the savages on the alert and let them know of the pursuit, they came to a standstill behind the great boulder till the electric fireworks should have burned themselves out.

The girl was naturally the first object for their scrutiny. They had not far to look for her. She was in full view. She was seated on the ground, with her back up against a wall of rock. A scanty robe of *tappa* was wrapped tightly round her, and held in position under her folded arms. The distance was too great to see whether her eyes were open, but by the erectness of her head, the two men could see that Norah was fully awake. They saw, too, that she was unbound; her captors knew it was quite impossible she should escape them.

The two men noted all these points from their eyrie on the mountain side. Had the woman not been there, they could have poured down an avalanche of rock, which could have swept the plateau clear of its human inhabitants; and, but for that one circumstance, I may say that they would have done it without the smallest compunction. Indeed, they even examined the holding of the boulder which sheltered them, and finding out that it could be easily dislodged, discussed gravely the advisability of letting its potential energy loose on a sure errand of death and destruction.

"Yez see," O'Neill remarked, "it 'ud go down in two leps, an' then roll across the flat an' crush the life out of maybe half of 'em. An' 'twouldn't touch the poor wee girl because she's under the lee o' that shoulder wid the white patch on it. But, yez see, some o' the blayguard haythens would still be left wid sound skins, an' guessin' where the stone came from, the first thing they'd do would be to cut Norah's pretty throat; so that whatever happened to them, we shouldn't get her alive. Still I would rather see her lying dead, than know those fiends were torturing her down at their village, and we powerless to lift a hand to interfere. Man, dear, it's terrible to have to decide on such a point as this."

There was a minute's silence, which Sneyd broke. "If they were in any degree a civilised people down there, we might deal with them. We could loosen this huge boulder from its hold, and when day comes in, hail them to the effect that, if they did not deliver Norah up safe and sound, we would crush the life from every one of them, just as we did to their fellows. But these savages cannot believe in any treaty such as that in their warfare. It is clean beyond their experience. They would think that if once the woman was out of their grasp, we should proceed to take our vengeance all the same. They would do it themselves in a similar case, and they judge us by their own standard. And besides, even in the event of our being able to persuade them to let her go, what would be the result? As soon as we moved away, they would follow in spite of any promises they might have made to the contrary; and once they met us on equal ground, where we had no natural advantage such as we have here, there could be no possible doubt as to the final result. We might knock a few of them on the head as they came up, but we should be bound to go under sooner or later. We are both tough handfuls, but two men, however strong they may be, can't hope to beat a hundred. So I think, old comrade, the only wise course is to sit still for the present and gnaw our thumbs, and wait for what the future may bring forth. 'Every black cloud,' so Oleron used to say, 'has its milky lining,' and we must hope that ours is no exception to the rule. The outside has appeared black and lowering enough as it drove over us. The edge must show soon now. Let us hope the tint will alter before it has all blown past."

There was nothing for it but to wait.

Careful to husband their strength, and knowing the value of sleep, they did not both stay awake. They took it in turns to watch the savages' movements; and whilst one watched, the other, with sailor's aptitude, made the most of his short period of rest. Thus each had had a couple of refreshing naps when O'Neill woke his companion with the news that the savages had broken their fast, and had commenced the descent of the waterfall. Sneyd looked out, and was just in time to see Norah lowered over the brink, lashed to a pole.

The sight made her unfortunate lover groan and clench his hands in agony; but Sneyd noticed that she was treated with reasonable care, and would probably be suffering nothing except slight discomfort from the lashings. He called his companion's attention to this. But O'Neill was almost beside himself with fury at the indignities his sweetheart had to suffer, and would not listen to dispassionate reason. Excitable at all times, the trial that was thrust upon him now was almost more than he was equal to, and Sneyd was harassed by the gloomy thought, that if Norah was killed, his companion's brain would go under with the shock. And the company of a desperate madman, in such a predicament as his, would be the reverse of safe or pleasant. However, this feeling was but a passing one. He had a sincere regard for the Irishman, and loyalty to him outweighed any petty motives of personal safety. Besides, setting aside her relationship to his friend, he himself owed a debt of gratitude to Norah, which he was not likely to forget, or shirk repayment of if such were possible.

So he calmed O'Neill down as well as he could, and put it to him strongly that their only chance of saving the girl's life was to set about the task coolly and dispassionately.

They had gone down to the plateau as soon as the last of its previous occupants had quitted it; and crouched at their former vantage-post, the shielding rock beside the brink, they looked over at the descending line beneath them. The first few of the climbers had already reached the stone-strewn ground, and were pointing to the effects of the bombardment with unmistakable gesture. One by one th

others joined them. Norah, who was being lowered with tolerable care from ledge to ledge, came in her turn. Directly she reached the ground her lashings were cut off, and she was freed from the pole. As a proof that the bonds had not galled her, she was able to stand up and walk on at once; and as a sign that that there was no fear of her escaping, she was subjected to no further restraint.

The escort of Dajians marched their prisoner down the valley, past the old temple, and away through the woods. Till they reached the belt of trees they were in full view of the plateau; but directly they got into the cover, the high foliage closed over their heads. The two Europeans could restrain their patience no longer. That other Dajians might come out into the bare valley and espy them, little recked they. Their feet itched to be in pursuit. With strong nervous arms and monkeyish dexterity, they lowered themselves down the giant steps of the waterfall; and gaining the rough rock-strewn floor below, set off along it without a moment's delay.

They did not run, as they knew a long distance was before them, and one cannot run far over broken ground without either slackening speed, or becoming exhausted; but they kept up a good five-miles-an-hour walk, striding over stones, crashing through scrub, splashing through water-courses, and halting for nothing. They reached the timber and entered it. There was no doubt about the route. A hundred pairs of feet cannot pass over soft ground without leaving a trail which he who runs may read.

They pushed on through the cool tree-aisles without hesitation, but at the same time they kept a smart look-out ahead. It would not have done to walk plump into a settlement. The danger of such a proceeding to themselves they did not think of. Their own safety was a thing they had ceased to remember as a personal item, but as their lives were now for Norah's service, they must be cared for till the time came to place them at her disposal either for escape or vengeance. So they advanced circumspectly, but for a couple of miles they found no cause for alarm.

Then they came upon half-a-dozen squalid huts dotted round a clearing in the forest, and dropped back into cover to reconnoitre. A careful inspection showed that the place was occupied by a few women, a score or so of children, and, say, half-a-dozen old men. The younger men were evidently elsewhere employed.

"The whole crowd of them couldn't stop us if we wanted to march through," Sneyd whispered; "but we mustn't be idiotic enough to attempt that. It is clear that the men who have got Norah went through the village, and continued down some path at the other side. We must make a circuit through the woods till we come on their tracks again, and then must strike out a line of our own, parallel to it."

"But why not kape to the path when we're once round the village?" O'Neill objected. "It's terrible slow work squirming through the lianes and rattans that tie this timber together."

"Because if we kept the path, we might meet natives coming towards the village. That would mean a row, and if any of them got away they would go and rouse the neighbourhood, and bring a host of their friends down about our ears in half no time."

"True for yez," the Irishman replied. "Sthupid of me not to think of it. Come along now. Don't let's be afther waitin' any longer."

On they went again, keeping an eye on the rude path, and occasionally walking along it when the jungle proved impassable. But for the most part they held on a parallel line of their own, and twice avoided parties of natives by doing so. Judging from their weapons and travel-stained appearance, these men had evidently formed part of the expedition, and it was easy to deduce from this that the main body had broken up and most had departed to their own settlements. The prisoner would have but a slender escort.

"So much the better for us," said Sneyd, speaking of this. "The only thing now left is to find where they have gaoled her. But I'm afraid that will prove a harder nut to crack than any we have had so far."

Fortune, however, favoured them. Coming to a point where several paths met, they found that here the division had taken place. The majority of the men seemed to have gone down towards the coast, at least the grass was most trodden in that direction; but five had turned up a narrow alley amongst the trees, and in doing so had crossed a little stream. Their footprints visible on the black mud of both banks told of this, and O'Neill, who had been stooping down to examine them, raised himself erect again with a joyful exclamation.

"Begob!" he cried, "I'd swear to it among five thousand. See it there between these two floundering hoof-marks! The natest little fut in all the Pacific!"

"Norah's?" asked Sneyd, coming to him.

"Av coorse. Who's else's could it be? Look for yerself, dacent man. Foive wee toes, a pretty rounded heel, a small space where the high instep arched over the mud; an' the whole is covered wid the palm of me hand. Look! Don't tell me there's another dainty fut like that on Daji, barrin' the match to this. An' see here that is. There! av yez want further proof, there 'tis. Poor darlint, she cut her right heel on these infernal mountain stones, as yez will remember, an' ye see it made her limp a bit. Look how gingerly she's gone. All the weight on her toes, an' the heel scarcely markin' the ground. Come along wid yez. Don't let's be waitin' any longer."

If Sneyd was but half convinced, the Irishman was wholly satisfied, and strode along the path which he felt would bring him to his sweetheart's side, as fast as his sturdy legs would carry him. His brawny hand gripped the shaft of his rude stone-headed mace till the muscles of his arm stood out like ropes, and his whole body tingled with excitement. The Englishman followed closely upon his companion's heels as a matter of course, half dreading lest the other's precipitancy should lead them into an ugly mess.

But O'Neill would listen to no suggestion for caution. "The poor darlint's on ahead, an' she's wantin' help. I feel she's wantin' it—now—this minute." Such was his only reply, and having delivered himself of it, he pressed forward with even greater pace. So there was no help for it but to go on.

Every now and again footmarks on a piece of soft ground showed them that they were still on the right track. The path wound in and out, making a five yards' circuit for every yard's advance, and so their view was a narrow one. For the jungle around and above was one thick matted block, and the path bored amidst the foliage like a tunnel through rock.

Of a sudden the thick forest ended. There were a few scattered trees beyond the abrupt edge of the wood, but these were small, and did not obstruct the view.

The two Europeans made a momentary stop. Before them was a tiny bush and grass-floored valley, surrounded by high precipitous walls of rock—a gloomy place that saw but a very few hours' sunshine in the day. In the middle of it was a small bamboo hut.

As the two men stood there, a woman's scream rose in the still air, which electrified them into motion again. They tore across the intervening space as hard as their legs would carry them. O'Neill was first. He dashed in through the doorless portal of the hut. Norah was there, struggling with two savages. She welcomed him with a cry of delight, and her persecutors let her go to clutch hold of their weapons. Sneyd sent one to earth with a skull crunched like an egg-shell. The other bolted out of the door; and, winged by fear, made for the forest path like a scared wolf.

All had happened in a few seconds—as quickly as you read it.

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Seeing that there was no chance of overtaking the fugitive, Sneyd turned to the girl. "Norah," he said, "weren't there four of these beauties with you?"

"Yes," she replied. "The others are behind the hut, I think. I heard them there just before you came up."

Sneyd darted out again, O'Neill after him. They were just in time to see two forms rush down the path through the forest, and disappear. It was useless to pursue them.

"Now," said Sneyd, "we haven't a moment to lose. Those beggars will rouse half the island in twenty minutes' time, so we must take to the hills again without delay, and work our way across to Ebry's camp. We are none of us over fresh, and must take the journey in two stages, if not three. But start at once we must; so, Norah, my dear, I hope you feel equal to it. We will help you all we can."

They went out and scrutinised the rocky wall. Their faces grew longer as they did so.

"The place is like the side of a house," Sneyd murmured in English.

"An' not bein' flies, I don't see how we are to climb it," replied O'Neill. "That's the only possible place just opposite you now, but I don't see how we are to get more than thirty yards up."

"It may improve as it goes on," said Sneyd. "Anyway we must try it. Here, give me a leg up, and then hand Norah on."

By dint of hard climbing they gained those thirty yards, and then found, beyond all manner of doubt, that they could not get an inch farther. The rock above was sheer, without fissure or cranny in it. There wasn't a vestige of foothold anywhere.

"We won't stay here for them to make a cock-shy of us," cried O'Neill. "We must try an' get down the path to somewhere."

They reached the ground again, and were making across the open to the edge of the forest, when a couple of savages emerged from the covering trees and stopped confidently.

"Cornered at last," exclaimed the Irishman. "Well, they haven't killed us yet, an' by the powers there'll be a good number o' them makin' their wives into widows before they do manage it. Into the hut wid us. There's just two doorways, an' wid luck we ought to make 'em pay dearly for their bargain. Here we are. In wid yez. Norah, darling, good-bye. I've done me best, and so's Sneyd. There, go an' kiss him, an' then come and kiss me. Here's a bamboo knife that once belonged to that ould blayguard, Ebry, who was at the bottom of all the mischief. You know what to do wid it when we get bowled over?"

Norah nodded her shapely head.

"They will not get me alive this time," she said simply; and then they took leave of one another, and waited for the end.

* * * * *

But the expected end did not come. There was no fierce onset heralded by barbaric yells. There was no grim hand-to-hand fighting, of one man framed in a doorway against as many as could crowd near enough to aim a blow at him.

The savages poured out of the path through the forest in dozens and dozens, but they massed themselves in a sullenly murmuring mob just outside the wood, and showed no signs of advancing to the attack.

A hint had been passed round that these white men who showed such wonderful powers, who had perpetrated such great slaughter, were more than mortal—were gods, in fact. With all kinds of superstition rampant amongst them, it did not take long before this shadowy hint was metamorphosed into a solid belief, and their was not a man amongst the whole crowd who would have dared lift a weapon against such awful beings. But still the hate for them was undiminished. "They might be gods," argued these curious logicians, "but assuredly they must be gods of evil, harm-working deities, and as such, should be destroyed."

I believe in all other mythologies a God is *ipso facto*, immortal; but in that of Daji it appears that gods whose influence is malign, are capable of being destroyed, either by fire or water. Water was out of the question here, or they would doubtless gladly have tried it; but the dry parched grass, and the withered shrubs of the valley's floor offered a capital medium for the other alternative. The moist woods would not suffer. Scarcely their outlying branches would be singed. But the tinder dry herbage round the hut would blaze with summary fierceness. Small fear of the white men and their *protégée* escaping that ordeal.

So the accustomed labour of rubbing fire from wood was gone through, and the funeral pyre was lighted. The flames spread like oil on water, licked up the dry grass, and roared in awful fury.

The trade-wind was blowing gently up from the sea, and the tawny torrent of fire rolled on before it, polluting the clear burning blue above with clouds of inky smoke, and leaving the ground behind black and bare. It reached the hut, sprang at it with a venomous bound, and wrapped it in crackling flames in a moment of time. The dry bamboos exploded and bent; the roof fell in; and the yellow surge swept on, leaving a few flaming stumps to mark its work.

The flames stretched in one continuous line across the valley now, and licked the grim stone barriers on either side.

"We are rid of our enemies," exclaimed a chief in tone of exultation. "If they were not destroyed in the hut, they must be pinned against the rock further on. They cannot escape now. The cliffs are unscalable."

But scarcely had the words passed his lips than a dark spot was seen in the yellow wall of flame, which widened and increased till it resolved itself into a man, who stepped out from the furnace, and stood apparently unharmed on the blackened ground beyond.

He was the black-haired white man.

Behind him came the Erman girl and him with hair like the sunset, both of them uninjured by the fierce ordeal they had come through.

The three were bearing branches in their hands, which they threw to the ground when they emerged to the open; and then, without looking back, they advanced straight towards the savages.

One yell of terror made the welkin ring, and then those cannibal Dajians fled. The men they had tried to harm were gods indeed. With no other charm than a simple fan of *tii* bush they had bidden the flames avaunt, and had emerged from the fiery embrace unscathed, unsinged. The only hope for the island now was that they would betake themselves across the sea to Erma, whence they came, without taking further revenge for the insults which had been showered upon them.

And so Norah and her two companions got a canoe, victualled it, and put to sea without further molestation.

(To be continued.)

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How the Captain's Heart was Reached.

At nine o'clock sharp, Captain Chéreau left his club and went home to bed.

Every night, after undressing methodically, he would hang his dolman over the back of a chair, lay his trousers lengthwise on the sofa, folding them carefully in the creases, and wind his watch, and drink a glass of water. Then one good blow of the fist—just one—upon the feather pillow, and he would crawl into bed and extinguish the candle. This was his invariable method of procedure, performed almost mechanically for twenty years past.

The Captain closed his eyes and thought about the events of the day. He had lost at dominoes and had had to pay for coffee for two, and that had annoyed him a little. Then he sighed, turned over, and fell quickly asleep.

Just how long he had been sleeping he could not tell, but for some reason he awoke. He lay still for a moment trying to find a reason for the unusual occurrence.

Everything was as he had left it when he retired. It was not raining outside, so he determined that it was mere restlessness, and soon fell into a doze.

Suddenly there was a queer noise in the next room—a baby was crying. As if bothered by an oppressive dream, the sleeping Captain tossed about restlessly, muttering under his breath something that sounded like: "Horrid little imp!"

But the screaming of the child became worse and more penetrating as the time wore on, until the room seemed fairly filled with it. Then the Captain found himself wide-awake, and he gave vent to his feelings in a single strong word. For a year he had not had a whole night's rest!

His neighbours were a young couple, a mere Lieutenant and his wife. Since the arrival of a baby next door the crabbed old bachelor had had to suffer its moaning, then its crying, and now it was old enough to shriek lustily.

Instead of mending, matters had, indeed, become still worse, since the baby's father, this "mere Lieutenant," with his sharp voice and his stupid baby-talk, had tried to take a hand in the quieting of the child. His "Where's baby's hair?" and "Does baby love papa?" which he would repeat ten or twenty times, until the little tot would point to its head or stroke its papa's cheeks!—oh, how trying it was!

But never before had the crying of the child been so piercing as it was this night. It was a succession of screams of fright; the shrieks of a child left alone at night, crying until the little throat was raw, until it lacked breath to utter another sound. Alarmed and angry at the same time, the Captain jumped out of bed exclaiming:

"Well, well, what's the matter now?"

Ordinarily, the sharp voice of the Lieutenant or a lullaby from the mother soothed the troubles of the little one. This time, however, the tears remained undried. The old bachelor quickly put on his uniform and went into the hall.

The door of the adjoining apartment had by some accident been left ajar; a lamp was burning brightly on the table in the anteroom. He took it and entered the sleeping-room.

By the side of the large bed stood a cradle. There lay the little one in a jumble of cushions, beating the air with her hands and feet. Her face had become a dark red from the exertion of yelling and kicking.

Quickly the Captain looked through the apartment, stepping into the dining-room, the elegantly furnished parlour, the girl's room, the kitchen. Not a soul was there! Even the nurse-girl was nowhere about.

"Bother it!" he exclaimed. "So, while the Lieutenant and his wife spend the evening at an entertainment, the nurse-girl runs out to meet her sweetheart! Humph!"

Quickly he returned to the cradle, and lifted up the little baby, a tiny girl. But she struggled so hard with her legs, and made such violent movements with her little body, that the Captain was afraid he might drop her.

He sat on a chair and placed her upon his knees. But she still kept on crying. To quiet her the Captain got up, held her before him with outstretched arms, and began to dance some step which he invented on the spur of the moment. It resembled the trot of a horse more than any known dance.

To complete the effect he sang, keeping time with his fancy step: "Houpla, houpla! tolderolloll!" over and over again.

His efforts to quiet the baby were almost crowned with success; she sobbed a little less, the tears became scarcer and scarcer—the last drops from an empty vessel!

Suddenly she lay quite still; her eyes, her expression, her outstretched arms plainly conveyed a desire for something. The Captain turned his eyes in the direction of the object coveted by the little girl; she wanted his cross—his V.C.

For the moment, the coloured ribbon and trinket seemed to her, as to many other babies, the most desirable object in the world. The old bachelor allowed the awkward little fingers which were so slim and straight, to take his cross. The little one at once quieted down and began to smile sweetly at him.

Captain Chéreau felt proud—proud as a hero after a hard fought battle, crowned with victory. Never had the smile of a woman been so welcome to him; never had he been so happy, so joyful as at that moment! He walked about, and now he better succeeded in holding the little girl in her long night-gown.

The rough old Captain looked down upon her with the eyes of the explorer who discovers a new country. The little round cheeks, with the dried tears still visible upon them; the little, half-opened mouth, made him feel curiously soft-hearted. With exuberant enthusiasm he drew up the little head to his own bearded face.

"Do you love me?"

But the coloured ribbon of the cross was a far greater attraction for baby than the Captain's big moustache. Then he hit upon the idea of disguising his voice and imitating the Lieutenant, and asked coaxingly:

"Does baby love papa?"

He had to repeat this question at least twenty times. If there had been on the other side of the wall a certain Captain about forty-five years of age, how angry he would have been to have heard that!

But this very Captain just then permitted a rather young lady to kiss him, and the oddest thing about it was that the two fresh, moist lips that touched his cheeks made his eyes grow dim with tears and refreshed his kind and loving old heart.

A clock struck midnight. Nobody came home, neither the nurse nor the young couple. The little one was

tired enough to drop, but Captain Chéreau was a novice in the art of putting babies to sleep. He remembered, however, that the baby's mother had always hummed a melody. That he might try also. But alas! he only knew military marches. Well, he would try a march on the baby.

Pacing up and down the room with long steps, he rocked the little girl—who had long ago succeeded in loosening the ribbon from his coat, and was now busy trying to bite the cross—and softly hummed a soldier's song.

But the sweet little burden upon his arm did not care to go to sleep just then; she mumbled inarticulate sounds, laughed and looked at him with her big, blue eyes. Then Captain Chéreau thought that the rhythm of his song must have been too lively; he started another, a very slow, monotonous tune, all about "the boy that went away and would come back on the morrow."

He sang so well and developed such zeal that the little girl actually went to sleep. The Captain was so afraid that she might wake up if he tried to put her back into her little nest of lace and feathers, that he sat down carefully in an armchair and remained there without stirring.

The room had become still again; only the clock on the wall ticked with every swing of the pendulum. The Captain looked intently at the child; sleep seemed to have overcome her in the midst of some motion; one of her dimpled fists lay on his breast, the other still clasped the cross.

Peace rested upon the pure, closed eyelids, upon the curls over that moist forehead, upon the tender cheeks, upon the half opened lips, from which a deep breath issued at regular intervals.

The warmth of that little body permeated his, and rose in him as a wave of intoxication. Does that joy really exist, then, he asked himself, which fills all those who are near to a child? And that warm tenderness issuing from a child's heart is not an empty delusion, either.

Oh! what a difference between the empty superficial life he led, and the ever-anxious, solicitous love inspired by such a sweet little creature, whom one could love from first to last, from birth to death!

The noise of the clock suddenly seemed to fill the room, and Captain Chéreau felt that he was an old man; he felt it plainly, just as one notices the hair getting white.

"How short is life after all!" he sighed. And he regretted his lost years, his wasted years, his selfish life of which there would remain nothing, nothing at all. There would be no one to mourn him even.

A wave of emotion came over him, and went from his heart to his eyes.

There were steps in the anteroom; the young couple had come home at last, she wrapped in furs, he with the collar of his coat turned up. On the threshold of the room they halted, thunderstruck; near the table in the big armchair sat their fellow lodger, the Captain, holding in his arms their child, fast asleep, and still holding the Captain's cross in her tightly closed fist.

They were about to cry out at the unusual scene:

"Oh, Capt in——!"

But Captain Chéreau lifted his head, and, showing his face flooded with tears, he whispered softly to them, placing his forefinger upon his grizzled moustache:

"Hush! She's asleep."

Mabel Webber.

£1,000 PRIZE COUPON.

Further particulars respecting this Competition, which closes on Monday, April 17th, will be found on page 337.

S. S.

My estimate is - { *Births* ..... / *Deaths* ..... } *Write in large Figures.*

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Address .....

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2. .....
3. .....
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THE TIMMINS TROUBLES.

XIV.—A FISHING EXCURSION.

"I say, my dear," said Mr. Timmins, with a sort of grin, "how would you like to go fishing?"

"Wouldn't that be perfectly lovely!" said Mrs. Timmins. "I never went fishing in my life, and I always wanted to try it. Where can we go?"

"Well, there are lots of places not too far off. Last summer I saw boys catch a good many fish off the Tilbury Docks We might go there."

"Just the place," conceded Mrs. Timmins. "Perhaps we can catch some sardines," and in her glee Mrs. Timmins waltzed across the room and back again. Mr. Timmins smiled pleasantly upon his wife, and started out into the yard to get some worms, while Mrs. Timmins dressed herself for the pending excursion.

"Have you got any fishing sticks?" she asked, as Mr. Timmins returned, rather warm from his exercise.

"I've got some fishing rods, if that is what you mean," replied Mr. Timmins, "but I could only find four worms."

"Can't we break them in two?" inquired Mrs. Timmins, anxiously.

"I dessay," grunted Mr. Timmins. "Come along, if you are coming," and, thoroughly equipped for the expedition, Mr. and Mrs. Timmins set out.

* * * * *

"How long before they bite?" asked Mrs. Timmins, hoisting her hook out of the water and examining the point of a worm her husband had impaled thereon,

"They'll probably bite at that as soon as they can borrow a step ladder," retorted Mr. Timmins, eyeing the dangling hook. "If you want to get any fish you had better let that thing down in the water."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Timmins, dropping the hook. "Do you think I could catch a goldfish?" she inquired, after a pause.

"Hi! hold on. There, I've lost him!" burst in Mr. Timmins, firing his hook up towards the sky.

"So did I!" chimed Mrs. Timmins, as she fell over backward, and shot her float into Mr. Timmins' straw hat. "I declare we both lost him."

"What are you doing?" demanded Mr. Timmins. "What did you lose? When I'm pulling in a fish you just sit still, will you? Do you take my head for a fish-pond? Drop it, I tell you! Drop it into the water. There! Now sit still and fish. Another time I'm pulling in a mackerel, you let things alone. You made me lose that fish."

"You ought to have caught him," said Mrs. Timmins soothingly, "you fished splendidly for him."

"I understand the business," rejoined Mr. Timmins, somewhat mollified. "You see he didn't even get the bait, big as he was."

"I'm glad of that, because we've only got three worms left. How I'd like to catch an oyster. Do you know I——"

"Hush! Sh-h-h-h-h-h! Quiet now! Now I'll fetch him!" and Mr. Timmins reeled in until he landed an old boot.

"I didn't know that fish looked like that when they first came out of the water," said Mrs. Timmins, quivering with excitement. "Crack him and let me see what he is."

"Crack your grandmother!" snorted Mr. Timmins, shying the boot away. "He wasn't good to eat. I'll get something——"

"What's the matter with my stick? Let go, you nasty thing. Here's another one. Quick!"

"Pull him out, can't you? You've got a bite. Haul him up!" cried Mr. Timmins, trying to untangle himself from his line and help his wife. "Lift him out of the water."

"He won't let me!" squeaked Mrs. Timmins, holding both arms out at full length. "Take him off! Go away, you monster!"

"Lift your rod straight up in the air!" shouted Mr. Timmins. "Hoist the thing up!"

Mrs. Timmins exerted herself, and disclosed an eel dangling.

"It's an adder!" she yelled. "Don't go near him! Fire, fire! Murder, murder! Police, police-e-e!"

"Hold on hard, will you?" shouted Mr. Timmins. "Get him over so that I can catch him. What are you holding him out there for? Waiting for him to dry? Stick that rod straight up in the air, I tell you!"

Mrs. Timmins threw the rod over her shoulder and flopped the eel into Mr. Timmins' countenance.

"Hang the thing!" he shrieked. "Stop waving that lightning-rod like a flag, will you? Hold it still, I say."

"Don't touch him! Throw him overboard! He'll sting you to death!" gurgled Mrs. Timmins, and, forgetting that the rod still exercised an influence over the eel, she gave it a jerk and slipped it through Mr. Timmins' fingers. That gentleman made a spring for it, and swashed into the water.

"Heu! blab! beu! waggle! glu! hic! gah! gaggle!" spluttered Mr. Timmins, as some lighterman fished him out.

"Did you catch cold, dear?" inquired Mrs. Timmins, with solicitude, as they made their way home.

"If I did, I landed it!" growled Mr. Timmins, blowing mud like the exhaust of a tug.

"Anyhow, I caught an eel, didn't I?" asked Mrs. Timmins, carrying out a woman's idea of comforting a man with the only thing he doesn't want to hear about.

"Oh, you caught it!" ripped out Mr. Timmins. "You're a fish-woman, you are! All you want now is glass sides and some bubbles running through you to be an aquarium. Another time we both go fishing you'll stay at home. You hear?" And, with this novel mathematical suggestion Mr. Timmins shunted himself to his domicile and took a glass of toddy to ward off the cold he felt coming on.

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CONSULTATIONS FREE.

Competitions are always interesting, and my readers should enter the "£1,000 Prize" and the "Boat-Race Competition," full particulars of which will be found in this issue of *Short Stories*. Neither competition costs anything to enter, and you are bound to admit that life is worth living when you stand a very good chance of winning £1,000 or even £5. Tell your friends about it. If they win they may generously hand some of the prize money over to you. In any case, we will guarantee you a prize if they win—that is, if you act as one of the witnesses.

D. R.—A few years ago, almost all the horseradish on the English market was grown in Holland, and it was thought to be impossible to grow it here to such an extent as to compete with the Dutch. At the present time, the English variety is realising better prices than the imported root, and is driving it out of the market.

S. T.—An idea of the strength of bears has been given by a hunter in the Hudson Bay district. He watched a female bear carrying a dead heifer to the cubs at home. The animal carried her burden in her fore paws for a distance of three miles. He shot the bear, and out of curiosity, had both animals weighed. The heifer turned the scale at 200lb., the bear weighing 450lb.

P. C.—The overcrowding of trains here is bad enough, but it is far worse in the Indian jungle. On these jungle trains the cheap carriages are crammed to their utmost capacity, and it often happens that at every station scores of wretched natives are left behind to sleep and pass the time as best they can till the next train arrives—twenty-four hours later.

E. T. asks: "Which school is called 'Cromwell's School'? I am told that it is a very ancient school, and that Scott made mention of it in one of his novels of ancient England."——The Grammar School of the town of Huntingdon is the one to which you refer. It dates from the twelfth century, and was founded by David, Earl of Huntingdon, who is the Sir Kenneth of Scott's "Talisman." You are a little out in your data, you see, as regards Scott. For a very long time it was an asylum for the wayfarer and the stranger as well as a school.

Chem.—The most ancient pharmacopœia was found wrapped up with a mummy dating back to 1500 B.C. Most of the drugs in common use were employed thousands of years ago; castor oil and rhubarb, for instance, were ordinary medicines among the ancient Arabians.

S. W.—The Swiss mountains are not regarded as suitable residences by microbes. A bacteriologist who went hunting for microbes at an altitude of 2,000 feet, was unable to discover a single specimen.

Eye.—The invention of spectacles is an honour claimed for various illustrious personages, including Roger Bacon and King Charles II. Pliny says that Nero watched the gladiators fighting on frequent occasions through a concave lens of emerald, from which it is assumed that the ruler, who fiddled while Rome was burning, was short-sighted. The man who first put two convex lenses into a frame—which he did to enable artists to do small work—was Salvini degli Armati, of Florence; that was in 1285. His tomb, bearing the date 1317, has an inscription claiming him as the inventor of spectacles.

Wind.—A broken-winded horse is not so frequently seen in Norway as in this country. A bucket of water is always placed within reach of the animal when feeding, and he takes a mouthful of hay and a drink of water occasionally.

I. L.—The only statistics of illiteracy in Russia are furnished by the recruiting departments of the army and navy. Whenever a man presents himself for service he is asked whether he can read and write, and his answer is recorded. From the latest reports it appears that 40 per cent. of the recruits were illiterate. Far more females than males are unable to read, and it is rare to find an old peasant who can read and write; so it is estimated that not more than a quarter of the population of the Russian Empire have acquired the rudiments of knowledge.

Patriot.—"Rule, Britannia," was written by Thompson, author of "The Seasons." The music is by Dr. Arne. It first appeared in a masque entitled "Alfred," August 1st, 1740.

A. K.—The city of Ghent, in Belgium, is built on twenty-six islands, connected by eighty bridges. There are three hundred streets and thirty squares on these islands.

Brian.—According to a German scientist, the brain contains 300,000,000 nerve cells, 5,000,000 of which die every day. Presuming that the cells die in regular order—the oldest first—this means that we get a new brain every ten months. This seems to throw some light on the rapid change that takes place in the opinions of certain people.

B. N.—Mexico has had fifty-five Presidents since 1821, of whom no fewer than sixteen have met with violent deaths. We do not intend to include "How to Become President of Mexico" in our "Life's Work" articles in *P.W.*

Nubi.—Before the Duchy of Saxe-Coburg can pass from the British Royal Family, some calamity must carry off the Duke of Connaught, his son, and the young Duke of Albany. Supposing this to happen, the succession would fall to the King of Portugal. This would raise complications, and probably lead to the Kaiser taking possession of the Duchy.

C. E.—So far as is known, only one European Christian has become a Buddhist priest; his ordination took place a few weeks ago in Ceylon.

U. S.—Those best qualified to speak on the subject say that cats show a decided objection to taking up their abode in laundries, no matter how plentiful may be the supply of mice. This is probably due to the cat's dislike to wet and damp, while it may also be taken for granted that the not particularly pleasant odour of stewing linen offends the nose. At any rate, it has been found in many instances, that after a very short stay the cat leaves without notice.

Bike.—In some Continental cities the bicyclist is treated with more consideration than in our own large towns. In Vienna a grant of ground for a new street has been made conditional on the laying out of a strip of the road for the special use of cyclists.

Viz.—The custom of wearing the wedding ring on the third finger of the left hand originated with the Egyptians. They believed that this digit was directly connected with the heart by a slender nerve, and they held it sacred. Hence their adoption of it as the most suitable for the symbol of union.

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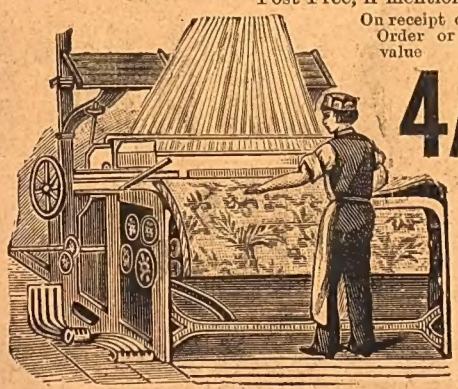

On receipt of Postal Order or Stamps value **4/6**

(Regd.). We will send you THE LARGEST GENUINE REVERSIBLE CARPET in BRUSSELS PATTERN WITH RUG ever sold at the price, direct from the Looms to any address on receipt of amount. Suitable for drawing-room, dining-room, bedroom, etc., bordered and woven in Brussels patterns, as an advertisement for our goods, thus saving any middle profit. Remember these are woven, and are made of a material almost equal to wool. Thousands of these Carpets have been already sold at double these prices.

Special Offer—2 CARPETS and 2 RUGS, 8s.

High School, Burnham, Maidenhead, Jan. 21st.

F. W. Baker, Esq., writes: "I have received the Carpet and Rug, and feel I must write to thank you for your excellent choice. I have shown them to several of my friends and they all think them remarkable value and very pretty. I trust soon to give you another order."

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE PRUDENTIAL

TURKEY PATTERN CARPETS

(Regd.

Reversible, woven throughout, bordered, richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

Size.	Each.		Size.	Each.
6ft. by 6ft.	2s. 11d.	REDUCED SALE PRICE.	9ft. by 15ft.	12s. 6d.
6ft. by 7½ft.	3s. 11d.		10½ft. by 12ft.	11s. 6d.
6ft. by 9ft.	4s. 9d.		12ft. by 12ft.	12s. 9d.
7½ft. by 9ft.	5s. 11d.		12ft. by 13½ft.	14s. 6d.
9ft. by 9ft.	7s. 6d.		12ft. by 15ft.	15s. 9d.
9ft. by 10½ft.	8s. 6d.		12ft. by 18ft.	19s. 6d.
9ft. by 12ft.	9s. 6d.		12ft. by 21ft.	22s. 6d.

When ordering, please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Regd.) to match above Carpets, sent for 1/6 extra, size 2yd. long and 1yd. wide. SPECIAL OFFER.—Three Hearthrugs for 4/3, or Six for 8/-, or Twelve for 15/6, sterling value,

Milton, Maybole, N.B.

Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Kindly send another 'Prudential' Carpet, pattern as before, 10½ft. by 12ft., 13s. 6d. She has had many from Messrs. Hodgson & Son, and begs to state they have given satisfaction."

All Orders despatched same day in rotation as they arrive by post. Cheques and P.O.'s payable to

F. HODGSON & SON, Manufacturers, Importers and Merchants, **Woodsley Road, LEEDS.**

Telegraphic Address: "ECLIPSE, LEEDS." Telephone No. 948.